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THE LIFE AND TIMES OF GORA

Mark Lindley

Foreword by Mridula Mukherjee

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The Life and Times of Gora

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Mark Lindley

with a preface by

Mridula Mukherjee

and an appendix by

James Farmelant

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To

George Willoughby

Praise for this book and for its subject

"In an age of information overload, sometimes we're reminded of what books were originally for – to pass on knowledge that might otherwise be lost, to ensure that the hard-won wisdom of the past will be there for us when sources of strength and enlightenment are needed in the future." - **Gregory Epstein**, Humanist Chaplain, Harvard University

"This fine book provides us with valuable information about Mahatma Gandhi as well as about Gora and is thus an excellent addition to the Gandhian literature." - **Prof. Bimal Prasad**, distinguished historian; Head, Board of Trustees, National Gandhi Museum, New Delhi

"Mark Lindley has rendered a singular service to that part of our history which concerns the making of a resurgent modern India. Gora was, like Mahatma Gandhi, driven by a passion for the substance of freedom above and beyond the quantum of political independence from the British Empire.... I am glad that this book has been written, and gladly commend it to readers in India and abroad." - **Prof. Mridula Mukherjee**, Director, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi

"Though not an 'authorised' account, this is the definitive biography of my father." - **Lavanam**

"[Gora] is a philosopher of the category of Acharya Sankara (the greatest Hindu philosopher who had lived 1100 years before)." - **Vinoba Bhave**

"He was one of those rare people who practiced what they preached." - **Indira Gandhi**

"He stood head and shoulders above his contemporaries, though very often his presence among them gave the impression that he was 'an odd man out'." - **Prof. Neelakanta Radhakrishnan**

"Gora was what one may call the most religious atheist." - **Arun Gandhi,** grandson of Mahatma Gandhi and President of the Gandhi Worldwide Education Institute (USA)

"We British count ourselves as pragmatists but Gora's simple down-to-earth practicality was something we have lost sight of." - **Christopher Macy**, Editor, "Psychology Today"

"Though there is a resemblance between your thought and practice and mine superficially, I must own that yours is far superior to mine" - **Mahatma Gandhi**

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Preface

The Life and Times of Gora is the saga of a remarkable figure in the Indian national movement whose story has hitherto gone mostly unsung by our historians. Mark Lindley has rendered a singular service to that part of our history which concerns the making of a resurgent modern India. Gora was, like Mahatma Gandhi, driven by a passion for the substance of freedom above and beyond the quantum of political independence from the British Empire.

Gora's courageous truthfulness and faith in his own radical insights brought him close to Gandhi. They held contradictory beliefs in regard to the concept of God, but the depth of their respective convictions made them good friends when they became personally acquainted with each other in the mid-1940s. Gora was fighting against superstitions and customs which generations of people had followed without ever questioning them, and he was often made to pay a heavy price for his engagement in that struggle. His ceaseless activism for the betterment of the condition of the depressed classes (traditionally depressed in India by means of religious doctrines) won Gandhi's avid support and admiration. Gora's efforts included "interdining" with "Untouchables" and organizing special education for their children, as well as obtaining for them access to public wells and temples. Gandhi paid glowing tributes to Gora's assiduous work in that regard.

In their first conversation with each other, Gora drew a distinction between mere "godlessness" and "atheism." His atheism was positive in ways that went far beyond denying the existence of anything supernatural. He described atheism as a "manifestation of the feeling of freedom," and declared that it was not just a theoretical concept but could undergird substantial social programs. He said to Gandhi, "I want atheism to make man self-confident and to establish social and economic equalities non-violently. Tell me, Bapu, where I am wrong." Gandhi, as he came to appreciate

fully the depth of Gora's conviction, remarked: "I can neither say that my theism is right nor your atheism is wrong. We are both seekers after truth. There is no harm as long as you are not fanatical; I will help you though your method is against mine"—and then even declared that Gora's thought and practice were superior to his own. In spite of Gora's professed atheism, there was so much in common between him and Gandhi that Lindley has very appropriately chosen to call him an "atheist Gandhian.".

The saga goes well beyond the Gandhian period, however, as it includes the crusade of a man who was ever trying to bring the deeper values of the freedom struggle (as conceived alike by Gandhi and Gora) to bear upon the political and social realities of the early days of the Republic. Gora was actively concerned with the nature of representative politics. Advocating a certain level of austerity and accountability on the part of elected representatives, he founded the first post-Independence political venture by Gandhians, the Gandhi Sangham, which campaigned for "pomplessness" in government. This and some of his other efforts brought him into active contact with several of the most significant political and social leaders of that time in India, including Jawaharlal Nehru, Jayprakash Narayan, J. C. Kumarappa, Vinoba Bhave and Indira Gandhi. Lindley has put the story into historical perspective by including biographical sketches of those leaders and describing in detail their relationships with Gora. It is notable that in all those relationships, Gora never compromised with what he thought was right and never refrained from putting across his point of view. I am glad that this book has been written, and gladly commend it to readers in India and abroad.

Prof. Mridula Mukherjee, Director,
Nehru Memorial Museum and Library
Teen Murti Bhavan, New Delhi

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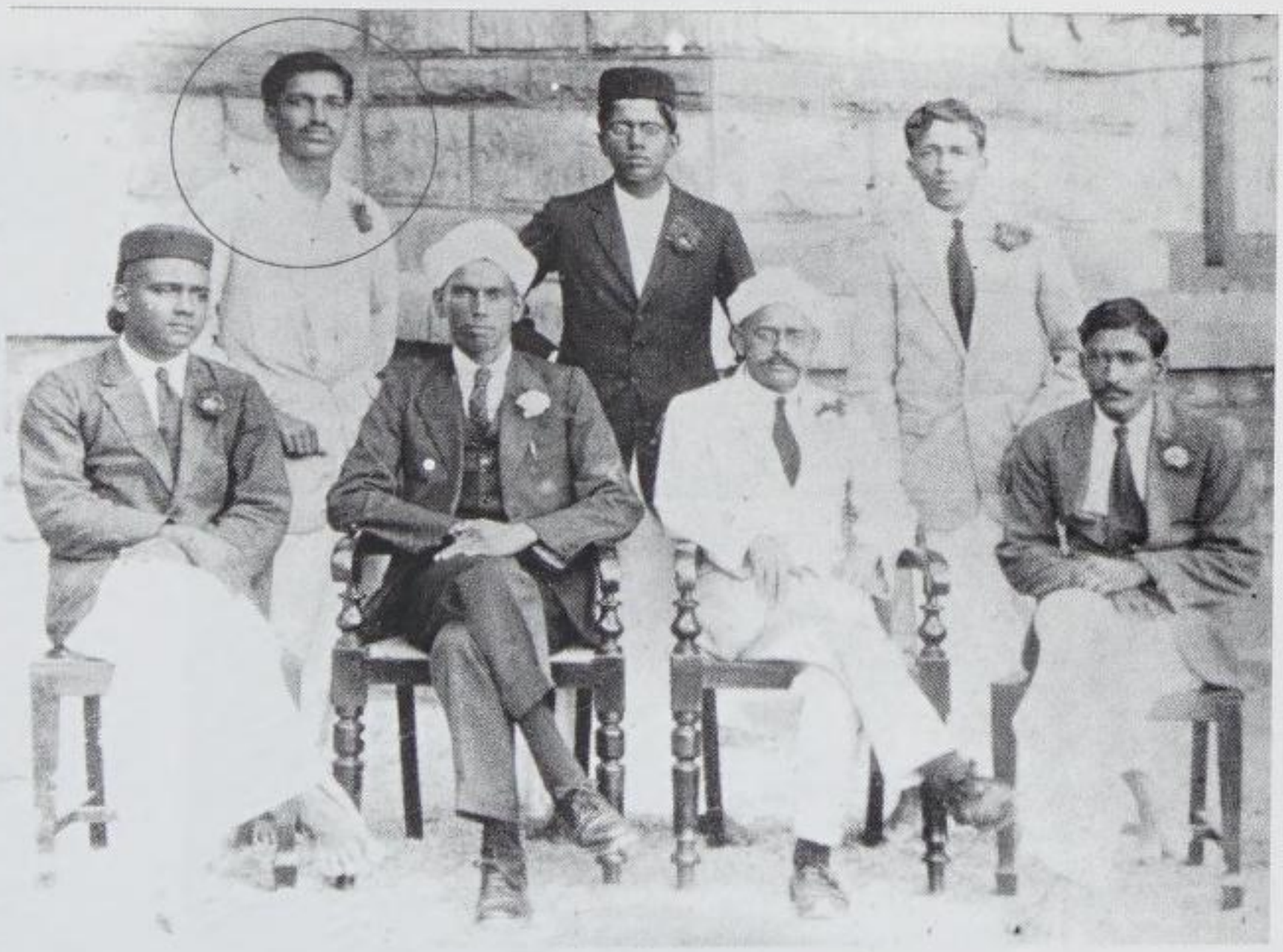
We are grateful to our editors at Popular Prakashan, and to Ratnadeep Adivrekar for designing the elegant jacket.

Mark Lindley
James Farmelant

Kakinada, 1918: *from a photo of Gora's high-school class.*



Madras, 1924: *the five biology post-graduate students and their two professors.*

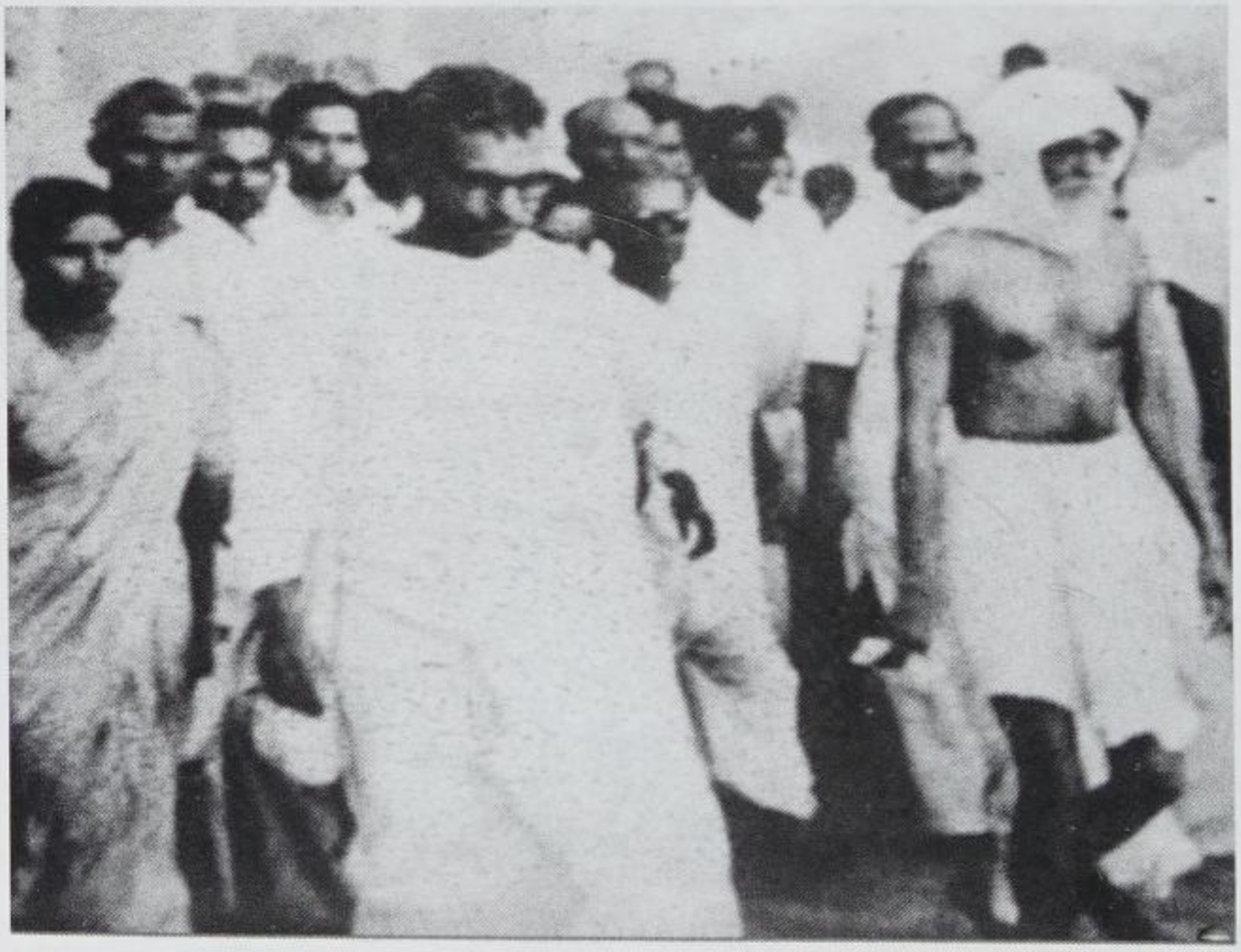
Madurai, 1925: *Gora (with long stockings) and ten of his most successful biology students.*

Sri Lanka, 1928 : *Saraswathi.*

Mudunur, 2009: *"Temple Square," where Gora held in 1940 his first public display of secular fire-walking.*

Allahabad, 1945: *from a photo of the All-India-Congress-Committee staff.*

Vijayawada, 1952: *Gora beating the drum as a "partyless" candidate for the national parliament. (The boy is Samaram.)*



Somewhere in Andhra Pradesh,1955 : *marching with Vinoba Bhave.*

Vijayawada, 1960: *with slogans of the "economic equality" campaign.*

New Delhi, 1962: *explaining the Sevagram-Delhi foot-march (with Lavanam translating into Hindi).*

***Vijayawada, late 1960s**: with George Willoughby.*

***Austin, 1970:** with Madalyn Murray O'Hair.*

Vijayawada, 1972: *with Saraswathi at the first "Beef-and-Pork Friendship" function.*

Vijayawada, 1974: *greeting JP with a garland of vegetables.*

2002: *the postage stamp issued in Gora's honor.*

Chapter 1
Introduction

Gora was a social reformer in India to whom Mahatma Gandhi declared: "Though there is a resemblance between your thought and practice and mine superficially, I must own that yours is far superior to mine." Gandhi's statement was all the more remarkable inasmuch as the promotion of atheism was part and parcel of Gora's work. This book is for readers curious about a person of such unusual character and moral stature. It will describe Gora's work in the context of the cultural and political forces that gave it meaning at the time.

Chapter 2
Childhood and Schooling

Gora was born on November 15th, 1902 in a small town (Chatrapur) near the east coast of India about halfway between Calcutta to the north and Madras to the south. That town and the others where he spent his first 37 years were in a large province of south-east colonial India called "Madras Presidency." Gora's family was Brahmin, that is, very high-caste Hindu in a society with hundreds of castes in five broad categories. Beneath the Brahmin "varna" (within which there were "sub-castes" because some Brahmins were regarded as higher than others) were three other varnas, each with their own many sub-divisons; and down at the bottom, so low that they weren't even in a varna, were the Untouchables: "scavengers" (for human feces), street-sweepers, janitors, tanners, cobblers etc., and their families. All these identities were hereditary; marriages were normally within the same major sub-division of the same varna; and Hindu morality was based on rather strict codes of behavior for each varna and each sub-caste. (It would be, for instance, a sacrilege for an Untouchable to learn how to read; and, any Hindu in a varna would

consider himself or herself polluted by direct physical contact, or indeed by certain kinds of indirect "contact," with an Untouchable[1] and would therefore be obliged to undergo a corrective ceremony.)

At the time of Gora's birth, his father was a clerk in the Forest Department of the British colonial government. The British Empire—the largest in the history of mankind—was at its historic peak in those days. Gora's father was the first member of the family to be educated (through high-school level) in British-type schools. He was adept at critical thinking, yet strictly pious as a Hindu. His attitude was like that of many non-Westerners of the last two centuries; he was equally unstinting in his appreciation of Hindu spirituality and of British administrative methods in India. He was an ardent monotheist and published four books of devotional poems celebrating the one God, Creator of the Universe. He was a lovingly strict and beloved disciplinarian with his children.

Gora's mother was, by all accounts, a perfect traditional Brahmin mother and wife: simple, hard-working, always smiling, never complaining, loyally subservient to her husband (even to the extent of being gracious to the concubine which he, like many other Brahmin men in south India in those days, was considered to be entitled to), observing all the religious customs, and unstintingly kind and warm to the children. I cannot describe her personality in more detail; the ideal Brahmin mother in those days wasn't supposed to have personality of her own in a Western sense.

There was, however, another woman in the household who did

---

1. In some parts of India the mere sight of an Untouchable was considered polluting, so it was the religious duty of Untouchables to call out, "Do not look in this direction!"

have it: Gora's father's widowed and childless sister. She helped raise Gora and his siblings (of which eleven were born and eight survived), and since she had been a family member already in her childhood, she ranked slightly higher in the household pecking order than did Gora's mother. But she was too kind or too diplomatic to criticize directly her sister-in-law or any of the other adults in the family. Instead she would, two or three times a week, go into a religious trance and speak "revelations." And, she and Gora's father would give the boy packets of sacred ash (from burnt offerings at the family altar) which he was taught—and believed—would protect him from evil and bring him good luck.

Around 1911, Gora's father managed to get a clerical position with the Revenue Department in a town, Kakinada, where the boys could attend an English-language secondary school. It was run by enlightened "reform Hindus" who included in the curriculum some study of Western sciences. That kind of study led Gora in due time to reject not only his aunt's and his father's superstitions but also their traditional religious identity and beliefs.

It may be of interest to mention that although Mahatma Gandhi's encounter with Western culture never weakened *his* Hindu identity, he did, like Gora's father, appropriate ideas from the British. In Africa he founded in 1894 a political organization, the Natal Indian Congress, with Western-type rules and regulations, and then in India after the First World War, he systematically transformed the Indian National Congress (the founding of which, back in 1885, had been instigated by an Englishman) into a mass political organization serving the Independence movement.

The first great peak of Gandhi's leadership of the Congress in India was when he launched, in August 1920, a national program of non-cooperation which he declared would win within one year (*a*) India's independence from the British Empire and in due time (*b*) the restoration of the caliphate (equivalent in Islam to the papacy

in the Roman Catholic Church) in Istanbul. Hindus and Indian Muslims were galvanized by this campaign (to which Gandhi was to call a halt in February 1922 because of the savagery of a Hindu mob in a village of north India where they burned to death some brutal policemen), but an employee of the colonial government, such as Gora's father was, could hardly participate in Gandhi's non-violent movement without losing his job.

In April 1921 Gora's father donated two bags of rice to the Non-Cooperation Movement by giving them to Gandhi at a public meeting in Kakinada, and for this he was suspended from his job. Being a devout Brahmin, he immediately took to religious meditation and to composing devotional songs. The local leaders of the Indian National Congress came to his house and urged him to join. He was the secretary of the local government-employees' association; so the prospect of his joining the Congress frightened his British boss into inviting him to return to work, which he did.

At about the same time (exactly when is no longer known) Gora himself took part in a series of non-violent demonstrations against British rule. The local police chief was a friend of his father's and therefore refrained from arresting the youngster as this would have cost his father his job. Gora was disappointed (he told his own son many years later) that he had failed to be arrested along with his fellow protesters. This episode did cause him to miss the 1921 university-entrance exams, so he had to redo his last year at secondary school; but whatever dismay he may have felt on that account was surely outweighed by the prospect of a good job in due time (after his formal education would be completed) and—perhaps no less important to him—the strengthening of the bond with his father.

Gora was vulnerable, however, to the danger of becoming too Westernized in his father's eyes. Anti-imperialism did not entail for Gora, as it had for Gandhi a dozen years earlier, any strong doubts about Western civilization. Gandhi, though deeply influenced by English legal and political traditions, had been impressed during a

visit to London in 1909 by a book entitled "Civilization, Its Causes and Cure," by Tolstoy's equally radical "Letter to a Hindoo" and by G. K. Chesterton's advice to Indians, in one of his weekly essays in the *Illustrated London News*, to disdain Herbert Spencer's sociological ideas ("What are the young men of India doing that they allow such an animal as a sociologist to pollute their ancient villages and poison their kindly homes?"). On the ship taking him back to South Africa, Gandhi had written a powerful little book setting out his ideal of Indian self-rule and including statements like:

> "The tendency of the Indian civilization is to elevate the moral being; that of the Western civilization is to propagate immorality. The latter is godless, the former is based on a belief in God."

and

> "In our own civilization there will naturally be progress, retrogression, reforms, and reactions; but one effort is required, and that is to drive out Western civilization."

Many 20th-century Asians and Africans have had such thoughts, but no such sentiment prevented young Gora from being so impressed by the scientific outlook of his zoology teacher that he would choose to study biology at the University of Madras, which had been founded back in 1857 and now in 1923 began to offer a graduate degree program in the Western science of biology.

Brahmins are traditionally vegetarian and loath to perform dissections; so Gora majored in botany rather than zoology. But he did allow himself to perform a few dissections so that he could minor in zoology, whereas the other four botany students in that first cohort at the University avoided this by minoring in geology. While performing the dissections he surely did not imagine that in the 1940s Gandhi (of all people) would approve of his use of that skill in a vivisection to teach an aspect of rudimentary anatomy to a class of nurses in training.

Shortly before leaving for Madras, Gora was married to a ten-year-old girl, Saraswathi, in a wedding ceremony which was so full of Brahmin rituals that it lasted for five days. The bride and groom had not known each other before and did not live together until nearly five years later. The match was made by the families, as was normal in India in those days (and still is today, though the average age of the brides has risen).

Gora took his master's degree in Madras in 1925, but in the final exam he was ranked lowest among the botany majors. This was a shock, because during the exam he had kept in his pocket some of his aunt's sacred ashes to ensure a good result. He drew two conclusions: (*1*) the grading of the exam had been unfair: the professors were biased against him because he had done dissections or because he was the only student whose native tongue was different from theirs, and (*2*) the ashes hadn't protected him.

He was now a graduate without a job. To avoid burdening his parents, who were not well stocked with funds, he took employment as a clerk and servant in the office and household of his former zoology teacher. That good man was unmarried and took him in and treated him like a younger brother. Gora soon discarded sacred ashes altogether, and then, two months later, he was offered a teaching position in biology at a school run by American missionaries who were sufficiently progressive to be unafraid of Darwinian science. The pay was modest but the cultural prospects were interesting. Gora was alert to the fact that he had got the job after deciding to do without sacred ashes.

Chapter 3

Teaching Biology and Becoming Radical

The city where the missionaries' school was located, Madurai, is famous for its vast and splendid Hindu temple, and was a generally crowded place with high rents. Gora found cheap lodging on the outskirts of town in a house which no one wanted to live in because it was allegedly haunted. He told himself that this venerated belief, shared even by some of his colleagues at the American school, was no more valid than his own former belief in the efficacy of sacred ashes. Time proved him right; no harm befell him, and after a few months the house was filled with tenants.

Some of his teaching methods at the school were unorthodox. Particularly disconcerting to the principal was Gora's tactic of giving all his students honor-grades in the internal "selection exam" so that they could all compete, three months later, in the "external" national exams for university admission. Gora thought it would be unfair to "detain" a student who might, given the chance, make good use of the three months and thus pass the decisive exam. He told his students, "I have done my part, now it is up to you to do yours"—meaning that they should study diligently for the external exam in botany so that he and the school would not be shamed by

failures. All of them scored well enough (and some very well) to be accepted for further studies at universities, which was a glorious result for the school; so the principal promised Gora a bright future—a full scholarship for doctoral studies at Yale and then a top position at the school—if he would convert to Christianity.

He declined the offer, because it would entail abandoning his religious identity for a material reward. He sensed that this scruple would sooner or later make his position at the school insecure, so for the following year he took a research position at a government agricultural college (in the town of Coimbatore in southwest India). But the invitation to convert to Christianity provoked him to make a thorough study on his own:

> "I started reading English or Telugu translations of the Bible, the Gita, the Koran.... I went through the volumes of Max Müller's *Sacred Books of the East*.... At one time, for over three months I pored over the volumes of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* every day and read through references and cross-references to "God," "Soul," "Salvation," "Rebirth," "Spirituality." ...[All this] introduced me to philosophy, sociology, ethics, economics, politics, anthropology, fine arts and psychology.... I came [eventually, after six years: see below] to the conclusion that it was man that made god out of psychological necessity in primitive times. Metaphysical justification of the existence of god was a clever afterthought of civilized man to preserve the faith, at best for its use as a sanction for moral conduct and at worst for aiding exploitation of the gullible."

That outcome was quite unlike Gandhi's reaction in South Africa to the dozens of books on Christianity which some kindly missionaries there had got him to read in the mid-1890s. Gandhi had taken seriously the possibility of converting to Christianity, but then had concluded that certain Christian doctrines (for instance, that Jesus was *begotten* by God the Father and that the natural consequences of one's sins can be eradicated by appropriating merit from Jesus

without necessarily doing anything meritorious oneself) are incorrect, and had meanwhile begun to take far more seriously his religious identity as a Hindu.

Gora's job in Coimbatore turned out to be unpleasant (because his British boss there was arrogant and scientifically ignorant); so in 1927 he accepted an offer to teach biology at a Buddhist college in Sri Lanka. His readings in the *Encyclopedia Britannica* had aroused his curiosity about Buddhism.

He and Saraswathi had meanwhile begun to live together. When she had arrived at Coimbatore, Gora had said that he could do without the various daily and weekly religious ceremonies that she had been, like any normal Brahmin woman of those days, accustomed to performing, but that she could carry on with them if she liked; she quickly decided, out of loyalty to him, to stop doing them—and then she became, at his urging, a debunker of superstitions. Among Hindu women, but not among the Buddhist ones, of which there were many in Sri Lanka, there was a venerated belief (still today widespread in India) that if a pregnant woman goes outdoors during an eclipse, her baby will be deformed. Saraswathi in the fourth month of her first pregnancy deliberately and publicly exposed herself to the sun during an eclipse. Five months later, in July 1928, she delivered a healthy baby girl. Gora and Saraswathi gave her a traditional Hindu name, "Manorama."

Meanwhile in June (1928) the reform-Hindu school where Gora had studied in Kakinada decided to offer a course in biology and engaged him to teach it. His parents were glad to get him back home; his father had retired, and Gora was now the main breadwinner in the family. Two weeks after arriving home, however, he overheard his aunt, in a trance in the prayer room, berating his mother while his father sat in silent adoration of the Supreme Deity of the Universe. Gora burst into the prayer room wielding a large stick and threatening to thrash his aunt unless she quit her nonsense,

which she did forthwith. His father was shocked and within a few days declared that it had been a mistake to let him get a university education—and a few weeks later expelled him from the house for not "renewing" his sacred thread as Brahmins traditionally do each year on the night of the full moon in August.

In the eyes of some people (though not of Gora's reform-Hindu employers) Gora and Saraswathi were now outcastes. She sold her ornaments—the jewelry which well-to-do Hindu brides wear as part of the dowry—to pay for a plot of land on which Gora built a thatched-roof hut for them to live in together with their daughter. His mother would occasionally visit. He continued to pay his elders' expenses.

Gora's readings in comparative religion led him now to a decision more radical than that of merely not renewing the sacred thread. He decided that Brahmins deserved no social privileges and that the Untouchables did not deserve their miserable condition; so, he started a free-of-charge night school for Untouchables living in a slum near his new residence as an outcaste. (Untouchables always lived in a separate part of the town or village, because they were forbidden to draw water from the same well as other Hindus.) This school was, from an orthodox Hindu standpoint, an outrageous undertaking: it was a sin to come into contact with such people; they were spiritually noxious and it was "written on their foreheads" that they were to be illiterate as well as Untouchable. All the local orthodox Hindus joined with Gora's father in declaring him outcaste. His reaction was to declare publicly a disbelief in any supernatural divine beings or forces, but since that particular kind of disbelief is an acknowledged possibility within the rich traditions of Hindu philosophy, the reform-Hindu school where he was teaching still retained him.

In October 1930, Gora's and Saraswathi's second child was born, a son, and was given a religion-free name: "Lavanam," meaning "Salt." This was in honor of Gandhi's salt-tax-protest

march, earlier that year, which had galvanized India politically just as much as the Non-Cooperation Movement had done ten years before.[2]

In 1931 some Brahmin friends of the family, including the family doctor (who had been trained at Madras in Western medicine), suggested to Gora's father that the issue of the sacred thread was of minor importance; and soon Gora's parents invited Gora and Saraswathi to dinner—and for this gesture were themselves ostracized by the local orthodox Brahmins. A happy result of this was that Gora rented a house where he and his parents and wife and children all lived together.

Gora's and Saraswathi's second daughter, born in 1932, was named "Mythri" ("Friendship") in honor of a hopeful political pact negotiated in 1931 between Gandhi and the British Viceroy.[3]

In 1933, one of Gora's students started a manuscript magazine and asked him to contribute an article on atheism. Gora obliged with a text saying that while the concept of God provides (*a*) answers to big questions, (*b*) moral sanctions and (*c*) support and stimulation

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2. Between March 12th and April 6th, 1930, Gandhi and 79 carefully trained colleagues (most of them in their 20s or even younger), accompanied now and then by hundreds or sometimes thousands of others, walked some 400 km to a beach where he picked up a handful of salt without paying the obligatory tax for "producing" it. Soon, many thousands of Indians (Nehru estimated 90,000) were imprisoned—and many were tortured in various ways (listed in the mid-June edition of Gandhi's journal day in those days, *Young India*)—for producing salt without paying the tax.
3. During the negotiations Churchill had declared: "It is alarming, and also nauseating, to see Mr. Gandhi, a seditious... lawyer now posing as a fakir, striding up the steps of the vice-regal palace, while he is conducting a campaign of civil disobedience, to parley on equal terms with the representatives of the King-Emperor."

to the fine arts, it is false and therefore has a corrupting effect, sustaining superstition and fanaticism. This shocked the school's governing board. They asked him to explain why he had said such things. His explanation was straightforward: those were his views. He was fired.

Gora now started his own daytime school, "Andhra Tutorial College," to prepare students for the university-admission exams. Thirteen of his former students collaborated in the teaching. The earnings were divided equally; his share was about a tenth of his former salary.

Among his students at this new school was the former head of the nonviolent anti-colonial resistance movement in Madras, a distinguished Congress member fresh out of prison and seeking now to become qualified for constructive social work. While helping Gora and Saraswathi in some of their work, she aroused Gora's interest in politics and introduced him personally to Gandhi in 1933. It was a momentary greeting, one of many thousands exchanged by Gandhi during his tour throughout India, from November 1933 through July 1934, to persuade Hindus to abandon the doctrine and practice of Untouchability; but Gora would of course remember it.

Toward the end of December 1933, Gandhi's tour brought him to Kakinada. There he held a fund-raising auction, in which Gora's father impulsively put in a bid for one of the items (an embroidered shawl). The amount was more than he—or rather, Gora—could afford, but less than Gandhi had expected the shawl to fetch. But there were no more bids, because, as someone explained to Gandhi, no one wished to outbid a man of such character as Gora's father. So Gandhi, politician that he was, let it go at that price, and Gora had to pay for it.

A few weeks later Gora sent to Gandhi a short and rather blunt letter: "You use the word 'god.' May I know its meaning and how far the meaning is consistent with the practice of life?" Gandhi replied, even more briefly: "God is beyond human comprehension."

Kakinada was in a part of the Madras Presidency called "Andhra,"

and by now a new "Andhra University" had been established. The head of that university (Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, who was to serve at Oxford from 1936 to '52 as Professor of Religion and Ethics, and later in India as President of the Republic) was a Hindu of such liberal inclinations that he admired Gora's work. He arranged in 1934 for a well-heeled Hindu school in another town in Andhra (Machilipatnam) to offer a course in biology and have Gora teach it. Gora's Andhra Tutorial College in Kakinada carried on without him, as his new job was rather far away. However, he now spent his weekends and vacations touring from village to village and holding meetings to discuss issues like superstition vs atheism, science[4] vs religion, social equality vs caste, and self-confidence vs slave-mentality. The meetings would last for several hours and would be attended by hundreds of peasants. This pattern of teaching college students in Machilipatnam while spending his weekends and vacations teaching village peasants was to go on for six years.

In 1934 Gora's and Saraswathi's third daughter was born and was named "Vidya" ("Education"). The next two children, both sons, arrived in 1936 and '39. The elder one was named (a few months after being born) "Vijayam" ("Victory") in honor of the victories of Congress candidates in provincial elections held in India in February of 1937;[5] the son born in 1939 was named "Samaram" ("War").

In 1939 some Marxist students in the school where Gora was

4. The science was, broadly speaking, that of Galileo, Newton, Darwin and Pasteur. In 1994, some rural old-timers described Gora nostalgically to me as "the latrine professor"—meaning that he had got them to build an outhouse. The traditional custom had been to go to any old place outdoors (which meant that women, in order to avoid shaming themselves, would have to wait until dark); any perceptible traces would then be cleared away during the night by Untouchables.
5. According to a confidential letter of December 21st, 1939 from the Viceroy to a colleague, the British regarded these elections as "best calculated, on a long view, to hold India to the Empire."

now teaching organized an academic strike. The headmaster blamed it on Gora's influence (though he was not a Marxist) and dismissed him. The students protested; he was retained on condition that he never express his atheism and that he have no contact with students other than to teach them biology in the classroom. He stayed on for a year, but then, rather than to continue under the restrictions or to take any of the jobs offered to him elsewhere (as principal of a new college or as head of the biology division of a pharmaceutical company), he decided, and Saraswathi concurred, to establish a rural social-work center in a remote village, Mudunur (population *ca.*3000), where he had visited in 1938 and had been invited to make his home. It was now that he simplified to "Gora" the long name that his parents had given him ("Goparaju Ramachandra Rao"). His mother wept. His father said, "You are an atheist, you have gone too far; but stick to your principles. If you back down now, you are not my son."

Chapter 4
Living in a Remote Village

Gora was based in Mudunur for seven years:

> "It was a wonderful experience.... We received cereals and pulses [beans] by collective donation, and clothes when we needed them. Vegetable growers who carried gourds and greens in the early hours of the morning to the market in the town would drop a few vegetables at our hut.... The omnibus on the road gave us a lift to the town free of charge, and somebody would buy us postage for correspondence. Our needs were met in kind, and seldom had we occasion to handle a coin...."

After putting up two thatched-roof huts, their first project was a free-of-charge adult-education school. It was not intended to carry on for more than a year (1940-41); its purpose was, in effect, to bring the local adult population into national civic society. More than 80 students from various villages attended daily:

> "The class... sat from 12 noon to 2 p.m....History, economics, politics, philosophy, sociology, ethics, logic, fine arts, geography, physics, chemistry, biology, geology, astronomy, mathematics, medicine [and]

engineering... were in our course of study. It was a pleasure to acquaint the villagers with the fundamentals of all the subjects, in their familiar language.... The social mix-up raised an uproar...."

Gora managed a gradual process of socializing among the students whereby, after taking tea together (in spite of being in different castes) for a few weeks, they progressed to taking together some snacks cooked by this or that high- or sometimes low-caste host family. The process had to be gradual because some of the high-caste students were reluctant to participate at each stage. According to traditional Hindu ethics it is a sin to take food touched by an Untouchable. Yet in 1941 they progressed to giving a "cosmopolitan dinner" under a full moon in the Untouchables' part of the village. Everyone in the vicinity was invited; the fee was one-fourth of an agricultural worker's daily salary. More than half of the *ca.*250 who attended were varna members. Three Brahmin youngsters were ostracized by their families and had to be given hospitality for a few days until their families could be reconciled with them. But then more such dinners followed in other villages.

During a solar eclipse in 1941, Saraswathi persuaded the pregnant women of the area to go outdoors together. Gora demonstrated in various villages that magnetic attraction and walking on red-hot coals are technological, not religious achievements. (Lavanam and Saraswathi and several other women walked on the burning coals, as I too have since done.) A local musician started composing songs on humanist and rationalist themes. A few sacrilegious marriages—intercaste and/or involving a widow—were celebrated in civil ceremonies and with intercaste festivities. Gora published an 80-page "Adult Education Reader" in Telugu (which was later to be issued in more than ten further editions; it included of course a few passages about superstition and caste) and an ambitious

philosophical book on atheism[6] that was released at a three-day jamboree of atheists at a nearby village which had a paved road running through it. Three hundred people attended from more than fifty villages where Gora had toured over the years. It was the first of many jamborees that he was to organize over the next thirty years.

Gora's and Saraswathi's fourth and last son was born in 1941. They named him Niyanta ("Dictatorship") as a reflection of current political trends. Even Gandhi had become a (benevolent) dictator as the Congress had given him sole authority to decide when and how to conduct the next phase of the anti-colonial movement.

In January of 1942, Gora founded a primary and secondary school with Telugu as the language of instruction and with classes taught by 15 teachers in eight subjects: Telugu, Hindi (the main language of North India), English, math, general science, geography, history, and civics. A third of the ca.150 students were from other villages and were boarded in a set of new, one-story, thatched-roof huts. To cook for several dozen youngsters (as well as for the family) was a little too much for Saraswathi alone, so Arjun Rao, a 22-year-old man from a nearby village who had taken an interest in Gora's work, was engaged to help prepare the meals. He was an Untouchable. Some of the parents objected (even though they had been willing in the first place to send their children to an "atheist" school), but none availed themselves of the option, which Gora of course gave them, of withdrawing their children. (Four years later, Arjun Rao would be put in charge of the kitchen at Gandhi's commune.)

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6. See Appendix. Gora had dictated the text already in 1938 to a young volunteer assistant, Nagulapalli Sitarahiaiah, who not only served thus as a scribe for this book but also helped him in many other ways—including, more than 65 years later, contributing to meet the cost of publishing the English translation, *Atheism: There is No God.*

In August of 1942, Gandhi called upon all Indian nationalists to "do or die" for the cause of achieving independence from the British Empire. Gora consulted with the staff of the school and called for a big meeting in September with the parents as well. The result was a unanimous decision to close the school in December and take up anti-British political activities on the anniversary of the Congress's initial decision in January 1930 to seek "complete self-rule." For Gora and most of the other villagers, the anti-colonial activism consisted of a group of about a dozen people walking on a public road carrying Congress flags and shouting slogans like "Long live Mahatma Gandhi!" and "Long live independent India—let us end our slavery!" Gora, Saraswathi, Manorama and Arjun Rao were among those who were jailed for several months in 1943 and '44 on account of this kind of activity. (Lavanam also helped commit some acts of sabotage—cutting telegraph and telephone lines—in 1943, but was adjudged a minor and so was whipped instead of being jailed.)

Gora was in jail from late January until mid-September (with a brief break in late July and early August). There he met other Madras-Presidency leaders of the Resistance, and they formed, in jail, a committee to revive and guide the Resistance which was now somewhat in decline since its "do or die" beginning a year earlier. Gora was to be responsible for the Telugu-speaking areas of Madras Presidency; so, upon coming out of jail he recruited and organized, with due secrecy, about 30 activists to organize in turn some small groups—five to ten people in each group, so as to be clearly in violation of the relevant colonial law—to stage nonviolent and non-destructive protests in the Telugu-speaking areas and in Madras. All the activists were men except for a group of six women led by Saraswathi. That group had only one opportunity to stage a protest—in the city of Vijayawada—for which they were jailed from April to October of 1944. Niyanta, three years old, was allowed to go to jail with his mother. She was pregnant with her next child, who was born two weeks after she came out of jail.

Chapter 5
Acquaintance with Mahatma Gandhi

It was a young disciple of Gora's who aroused Gandhi's interest in him. Dasu Ramaswami was an Untouchable who had managed, with much encouragement from Gora, to attend Madras University. Upon completing in 1941 his undergraduate studies in chemistry (with high honors), he had had to decide whether to pursue graduate studies or else live and work with Gora, or with Ambedkar.[7] He had opted for graduate studies in North India, but Gora had suggested that on his way north he stop off at Gandhi's commune for a day. Gandhi had immediately invited him to make his home there instead of pursuing graduate studies in chemistry; Ramaswami had replied that if he were to switch from studying chemistry to striving for social reforms, he ought to do it with Gora

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7. Ambedkar was an Untouchable-born political leader who opposed not only Untouchability *per se* (as did Gandhi), but also, unlike Gandhi for many years, the entire caste system. In the 1930s he was one of Gandhi's most brilliant and outspoken critics. In the late 1940s he served as Minister of Law and, at Gandhi's suggestion, as chairman of the committee drafting the Constitution of the Republic of India.

rather than with Gandhi, because Gora was doing far more for the Untouchables than merely trying to get permission for them to enter temples. Gandhi in reply had asked to be kept informed about Gora's work; Ramaswami had returned to Mudunur, had collaborated in various ways with Gora (next to whom he was the most highly educated person there), had taught science, math and English at the school, and had sent letters now and then to Gandhi. In September (1941) Gora himself wrote to Gandhi:

> "For one year I have tackled the problem of Untouchability with the atheistic outlook... [which] mainly consists in the non-recognition of sectarian labels like Hindu, Muslim and Christian. We take man as man. Thus by discarding the labels and by mixing up people in the general stream of humanity, we hope to remove Untouchability also.... The results of one year's work encourage us to proceed [further] along the same lines. Before we do so, we desire to seek your advice.... We are prepared to revise our outlook and program. If you like, I will go to Sevagram for a personal talk with you."

Gandhi replied:

> "Dear Friend, Atheism is a denial of self. No one has succeeded in its propagation. Such success as you have attained is due to your sincere work among the people around you. I am sorry I cannot invite you to come here. I have no time to spare for talks."

All the national Congress leaders were imprisoned for two or three years during the war. Gandhi was released from detention early in May of 1944 (sooner than the others) because he seemed to be about to die. But instead of obliging, he convalesced for eight weeks in Bombay and went home to Sevagram early in August. In reply to a letter from Ramaswami, Gandhi invited him to revisit Sevagram; he arrived there in October, and their talk this time prompted Gandhi to invite Gora as well. Gora came for a week in November and then for a total of five or six months, in several patches, in 1945.

On the first of these visits he took along his second daughter, Mythri, who was now nearly thirteen years old and was interested in his work and in national politics. They walked the eight kilometers to Gandhi's rural commune from the nearest railroad station (in a town where the Bombay-Calcutta and Madras-Delhi lines cross). Upon meeting them the next day Gandhi asked how they had come from the station, praised Mythri for walking, and asked her name; she of course told him; Gora explained its significance; Gandhi was delighted.

The two men had an appointment the next day. The first part of the conversation went like this:

> "What shall I say to a godless man?" (Loud mutual laughter.) — "Bapuji, I am not a godless man, I am an atheist." — "How do you differentiate between godlessness and atheism?" — "Godlessness is negative; it merely denies the existence of [any] god. Atheism is positive; it asserts the condition that results from the denial.... In general, theism is the manifestation of the feeling of slavishness in man. Conversely, atheism is the manifestation of the feeling of freedom...." — "You are too theoretical. I am not so intellectual. Go to professors and discuss." — "If atheism were only theoretical, I would not have cared for it, nor wasted your time. We have practical programs based upon the atheistic outlook." — "Ah, ah! I know that; so I am talking to you. Tell me what you are doing among the villagers."

(To understand the rest of the conversation one has to know that Gandhi regarded fasting as the most extreme form of non-violent protest, but would use it only to make the antagonist reflect, not—or at least not in theory—to make him do anything he did not already feel he ought to do; and Gora understood all this.) Gora described his social work in detail, and the conversation concluded as follows:

> "...So I take the propagation of atheism as an aid to my work. The results justify my choice." — "I should fast even because atheism is spreading." — "I will fast against your fast." — "You will fast?" —

"Yes, Bapuji; but why should you fast? Tell me how atheism is wrong and I will change." — "I see, your conviction is deep…."

For their second appointment, three days later, Gora took Mythri with him. As he stepped into Gandhi's hut, Gandhi chided him: "You are a half a minute too soon." Gora stepped back and apologized: "I'm sorry. It is four o'clock by my watch." Gandhi rejoined: "No, no, come in! Watches may disagree, but let us not!"

During a pause later as Gandhi was served some honey-flavored water, he turned to Mythri:

> "I've been having a meeting with your father; now I'll have one with you. If you stay with me at the ashram [experimental commune], I will teach you Gujarati [Gandhi's native tongue] and Hindi, and Abha [the young wife of a grandnephew of Gandhi's] will teach you Bengali, and since Prabhakar [an Untouchable who was in charge of the prayer meetings at the commune] speaks Telugu, you won't have any problems, so you can live here. And wherever I travel, I'll take you with me." — "Please, no, I cannot leave my parents." — "All right then, better stay with them. Now and then you can come and visit me."

Everyone at Gandhi's commune had to do "bread labor"—daily physical work to justify their consumption of food. Gora's and Mythri's early-morning bread labor was to clean latrines. Gandhi also encouraged Mythri to learn how to ride a bicycle, which she did with great delight; it was not the kind of thing normally allowed to girls in India in those days.

Gora and Mythri took leave of Gandhi on the last evening of their visit. Early next morning on the way to the train station they saw him again (with an entourage) approaching from a distance in the dark as he headed back to the commune at the end of his morning walk. Gora told Mythri, "Let's not disturb Bapuji; you can see how he's talking seriously with his colleagues; if he notices us, let's just wave goodbye." But when he saw them he came over to greet them:

"Mythri, you are doing very well, you are carrying your own luggage and learning the dignity of work. I do the same, so I appreciate your doing it. When will you return to Sevagram?" — "I'll come again."

Toward the end of October 1944, Gora's and Saraswathi's next daughter was born. She was named "Maru" ("Change") in honor of the change from war to post-war and everything which might follow from that.

Gandhi now invited Gora's family to live at his commune and to bring some colleagues from the Atheist Center to visit for a few weeks. They did this in 1945. Gora and Saraswathi were the only people in the commune who were allowed to cohabit, and the atheists were the only ones allowed not to attend the daily prayers. This caused some grumbling, but Gandhi's secretary reported that they were good workers and that their health was robust (notwithstanding the rather limited diet at the commune), so the next time Gandhi saw them he called out in a loud voice, "I hear you folks are made of granite," and thereafter showed particular cordiality to them.

One day as a group of children were cleaning and cutting vegetables and fruits outside the kitchen, and Niyanta and Samaram, who were now four and six years old respectively, were doing their best to help by handing them pieces of fruit, Gandhi came by and asked the two boys, "Why don't you eat some of the fruit now?" Mythri translated, and they replied, "We'll eat at mealtime." Gandhi remarked to an adult nearby, "You see, they have security; that's why they don't steal. When people have such security they become honest." On another occasion, he questioned Lavanam in more detail (I think he wanted to find out whether the sons of an atheist would have a sense of morality):

"Are you just washing [the tomatoes] or are you eating them too?" — "I'm just washing them." — "Why don't you eat them?" — "I'm not expected to eat them." — "Then why are you doing the work?" —

"So they can be served at lunch and dinner. Then I'll eat some of them." — "Suppose they weren't served to you." — "Well, in that case I might eat some while washing them." — "Yes! You are honest because you know that you will be properly compensated for your work."

One day in 1945, Gandhi urged Gora to give up his atheism, and Gora replied:

> "I could not remove god if god were the truth. But it [the idea of god] must go now in order to wash off [the] corruption [due to it].... I want atheism to make man self-confident and to establish social and economic equalities non-violently. Tell me, Bapu, where I am wrong."

Gandhi yielded:

> "I can neither say that my theism is right nor your atheism wrong. We are both seekers after truth.... There is no harm as long as you are not fanatical. Whether you are in the right or I am in the right, results will prove.... So go ahead with your work; I will help you though your method is against mine."

Another incident at Sevagram around this time shows the extent to which Gandhi had come to trust Gora's moral judgment. While teaching a class for nurses Gora proposed to make visible a frog's beating heart. Urgent protests were conveyed to Gandhi, who had himself always been a passionate opponent of vivisection; but his response was: "Dissect the frog if that is the only way to explain the heartbeat."

(Sevagram is today host to a scientifically oriented medical school as well as to Gandhi's commune and a museum.)

At home after this visit to Sevagram, Gora suggested to Manorama, who was now 17, that her parents seek for her a match with an Untouchable in order to set an example of

disregarding caste distinctions.[8] Manorama and Saraswathi liked the idea; Gora sent a letter about it to Gandhi; and he replied: "I am prepared to get the marriage performed in the Sevagram Ashram [commune]." This undertaking deeply affected Gandhi. In the 1920s and early '30s he had—partly because he could never accept Western-style social and economic competition—upheld an ideal of the ancient Hindu caste system as he imagined it to have been, with only four castes ("varnas"), with every man obliged to earn his living in the same way that his father had done, and with everyone being paid the same for their work. And he had argued that "prohibition" or at least "self-imposed restriction" against marriage between members of different castes was "essential to a rapid evolution of the soul." But now, because of the example set by Manorama, he vowed never again to attend a Hindu wedding unless it were between a caste-Hindu and a "Harijan" (this was his own term, literally meaning "children of God," for Untouchables); he urged "all caste-Hindu girls coming under my influence to select Harijan husbands"; and he wrote a new preface to someone else's re-issue of a book of his from the 1920s extolling the ancient caste system:

> "I do not have the time to read this book again. I do not even wish to.... There prevails only one varna today... [i.e.] for the service of society.... The reader is... requested to discard anything in this book which may appear to him incompatible with my views given above."

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8. Ambedkar's view of caste and intermarriage was that "there will be outcastes as long as there are castes, and nothing can emancipate the outcaste except the destruction of the caste system"—and: "The real remedy is intermarriage. Fusion of blood alone can create the feeling of being kith and kin, and unless this feeling... becomes paramount, the separatist feeling—the feeling of being aliens—created by caste will not vanish."
Gora's view was simpler: "This thorn-bush [the caste system] is in our path. It is useless to argue about who put it there, why, and when; the whole thing is against the interest of the people and we must simply remove it."

Gandhi wanted to be certain, however, that Manorama was acting freely. Early in 1946, when he had occasion to visit Madras, he asked Gora and Manorama (as well as Mythri) to meet him there, and he asked an orthodox caste-Hindu colleague who was fluent in Telugu to interview Manorama and see if she was under duress. But she was unequivocal: "We are working for social equality and the eradication of Untouchability." So Gandhi declared, "Now they are *my* children. Let them wait for two years and in the meantime let us announce their engagement." Arjun Rao, the groom whom Gora and Saraswathi had chosen, was sent for and came to Madras. Gandhi found him presentable and fairly fluent in Hindi, which was the one language common to everyone at Sevagram, so he invited him to spend the next two years there, while Manorama, who did not speak Hindi, would study at a nurses' and midwives' training center in Andhra. At Sevagram Gandhi told Arjun,

> "You should become like Ambedkar. You should work for the removal of Untouchability and caste. Untouchability must go at any cost."

Gora had meanwhile raised the delicate issue of the daily prayer meetings at Sevagram:

> "Arjun Rao will be in the ashram for two years. There must be clear understanding about the discipline. What shall be his position in relation to attendance at the prayers, Bapu?" — "Let him attend the prayers as a matter of discipline of the ashram, but let him not recite the verses if he does not believe in them."

Gora indicated his consent (by bowing). Gandhi probed:

"Suppose, in the two years that he sits regularly at the prayers, he turns towards theism?" — "I will be happy, Bapu. I do not want anyone to be an atheist with closed mind; he should be an atheist out of conviction. If he takes to theism out of conviction, I welcome such a change in him." — "Oh yes, I know you are not a fanatic! Instead of Arjun Rao taking to theism, it looks as if both of you will carry this old man into your camp!"

In March (1946) Gora sent Gandhi a letter, from the Atheist Center, to congratulate him for living in the huts of Untouchables during a visit meanwhile to Bombay:

> "I and my co-workers have been trying this method of residing and eating with the Harijans for the last five or six years. Our experience proves that it is an efficient method to remove the social isolation of the Untouchables. But our work is spreading slowly. If a man like Bapuji took it up, as he did at Bombay, it would gain wide publicity and attract more workers to the method. Side by side with the mixing up [of people born into different castes], an attempt also might be made to discourage the use of labels of caste and creed which raise imaginary barriers between man and man. Not only should the practice of Untouchability go, but the Harijan should not be allowed to continue a Harijan.... Similarly the Hindu and Moslem differences might be solved by discarding the labels. Such an attempt will no longer keep the form of communal harmony, but it would lead to the growth of one humanity.... Though a powerful personality like Gandiji might harmonize [different religious] communities for a while, when the personal influence weakened, the communities would clash again. So a permanent solution of communal differences is the growth of [the] one-humanity outlook rather than communal harmony."

It was in reply to this letter that Gandhi wrote,

> "Though there is a resemblance between your thought and practice and mine superficially, I must own that yours is far superior to mine."

A few months later, during Gandhi's epic campaign against religiously inspired ethnic cleansing in rural Bengal,[9] he told his secretary:

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9. Commenting on this campaign the British Viceroy said, "In the Punjab we have 55 thousand soldiers and large-scale rioting. In Bengal our forces consist of one man and there is no rioting."

"Politics have divided India today into Hindus and Moslems. I want to rescue people from this quagmire and make them work on solid ground, where people are people. Therefore my appeal here is not to the Muslims as Muslims, nor to Hindus as Hindus, but to ordinary human beings who have to keep their villages clean, to build schools for their children and take many other steps so that they can make life better."

Gandhi published in the mid-September 1946 issue of his journal, *Harijan*, an account of Gora's "assiduous work" in establishing the right of Untouchables to obtain water from public wells in various villages. And, surviving private documents show that Gora and Gandhi collaborated by mail in an effort to bring about the opening to Untouchables of a temple in South India.

The issue of atheism came up again as Gora and Gandhi were planning some details of Manorama's and Arjun's wedding at Sevagram:

> "In the case of your daughter's marriage, I will say 'in the name of Truth' instead of 'in the name of God'.... Concepts of truth may differ,[10] but all admit and respect Truth. That Truth I call God. For some time I was saying, 'God is Truth', but that did not satisfy me, so now I say 'Truth is God'." — "If truth is god, then why don't you say '*satyam*' ['truth'] instead of '*Raghupati Raghava*' ['almighty God']? '*Raghupati Raghava*' conveys to others a meaning very different from what it conveys to you." — "Do you think I am superstitious?! I am a super-atheist."

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10. Earlier in the same conversation Gora had said, "I think truth is only relative to human experience. The concept of absolute truth beyond human experience is but a hypothesis formed by man for the convenience of his thought process. Any absolute, like the infinite, is only an imaginary something." A comparable Western statement is the following from Fritz Mauthner's *Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache*, vol. 1 (Stuttgart 1901), p. 66: "Even the most certain truth is only more or less true. Real Truth is a metaphysical concept. Men attained to the concept of Truth just as they did the concept of God—without any experience. In this sense one may certainly assert: God is Truth."

Around this time, Gandhi asked Gora for his definition of moral behavior, and was pleased with Gora's answer:

> "I do what I say and I say what I do. That is my definition of moral behavior; there is no room for secrecy." — "Exactly!"

At Gandhi's suggestion, Gora did volunteer-work for the Indian National Congress in Allahabad and in New Delhi for about six months in 1945-46. In New Delhi it was a matter of trying to reorganize at grass-roots level. For Gora this entailed "cosmopolitan dinners" (people from different castes eating together), but most of the Brahmin Congressmen did not want to do this, so his career as a Congress "organizer" was short-lived, and he left the party altogether in 1947.

During some of Gandhi's brief patches in 1946 at Sevagram, Gora met with him there. They also met a couple of times in New Delhi, and at one of those meetings Gandhi asked him to describe his program for the eradication of Untouchability. Gora suggested (*a*) cosmopolitan dinners on a mass scale and (*b*) intermarriages. Gandhi replied he had in mind a special project for Gora to undertake, which he would explain later at Sevagram.

In one of their last conversations, Gandhi probed yet again Gora's adherence to atheism:

> "You... [should] give up the term 'atheism'. It does not help your work." — "I am well aware that [it] is a condemned word... yet I have taken it up deliberately, because it is the only word that inspires full self-confidence and complete social outlook in man.... So far I have not laid before you the several aspects of atheism as I see them. I am waiting for you to give me time. I want also to put my thoughts in a book form." — "I will go through the manuscript of your book. Come to me when I go to Sevagram next. We will have sufficient time to talk about your thoughts."

Gandhi was by now in many ways a secularist. He would say:

"I swear by my religion, I will die for it, but it is my personal affair; the state has nothing to do with it. The state should look after secular welfare, health, communications, foreign relations, currency and so on, but not your or my religion. That is everybody's personal concern."

"If officers of the Government as well as members of the public... work whole-heartedly for the creation of a secular state, then only can we build a new India that will be the glory of the world."

> "I do not believe that a secular state should concern itself with religious education as such.... Those who want to give religious education may do so on their own, so long as it is not subversive of law and order and morality. The Government can only teach ethics on the main lines common to all religions and agreed to by all parties."

However, this secularism of Gandhi's was due at least as much to Nehru's influence as to Gora's. More revealing of Gora's distinctive influence is the first part of the statement which Gandhi issued on January 18th, 1948 upon completing a fast by means of which he had shamed the Hindus in Delhi into stopping their ethnic cleansing of Muslims:

> "I embarked on the fast in the name of Truth, whose familiar name is God. Without living Truth, God is nowhere. In the name of God we have indulged in lies [and] massacres.... I am not aware if anybody has done these things in the name of Truth. With the same name on my lips I have broken the fast...."

On January 30th a devout and bigoted Hindu activist assassinated Gandhi.

Chapter 6
Moving to a Larger Village Near a City

In 1946, internal Congress elections were held (now that everyone was out of jail) for provincial committees throughout India. In Mudunur, a low-caste faction supported Gora, but a larger, middle-and-high-caste faction supported his original host there, who was (of course) native to the village. This competition prompted Gora to look for a new location for the Atheist Center. Early in 1947 he toured Telugu-speaking areas to promote social reform to local Congress members. (This was in keeping with Gandhi's idea, which was never accepted by the Congress politicians, that the Congress ought now to transform itself into a rural-constructive-work organization rather than a political party.) In some of these talks Gora mentioned that he was hoping to shift the Atheist Center from Mudunur—which was some 20 kilometers from the nearest town (Vijayawada), had no market place, was generally muddy, and had poor communications with the rest of the world—to a more accessible place. The host of a talk he gave in the village of Patamata, which was in those days about three kilometers from Vijayawada, responded by inviting the Atheist Center there. The shift, in April (1947), was to a former mango-grove owned by a

Brahmin who offered the land for this purpose. No new materials were needed for new huts; the folks from Mudunur helped dismantle the old ones, pack the materials in a couple of trucks and rebuild the huts at Patamata.

Before long the atheists were evicted from this site because its owner disapproved of Manorama's marriage (even though he had approved of the cosmopolitan dinners); but the village head frustrated this intent by donating some of his own land, and the Atheist Center has remained at that second site ever since. The brother of the new donor married Vidya in 1950.

Patamata was a rural place until the 1980s, but today is well within Vijayawada, which has grown to a city of a million inhabitants.

Gora's and Saraswathi's ninth and last child, a daughter named "Nau" ("Nine"), was born in November 1947. Soon afterwards he heard about a method of sterilization with practically no side-effects—vasectomy—and adopted it. He was 45 years old, Saraswathi 35.

It was in August of 1947 that India became no longer a colony in the British Empire but, like Australia and Canada, a republic and an independent dominion in the British Commonwealth. However, for about a year afterwards there was some doubt as to whether certain large parts would be provinces of India (called 'states' after Independence). Kashmir, the people of which were *ca*.80% Muslims but were ruled by a Hindu maharajah, is still today problematic. Just as large and rich as Kashmir was the State of Hyderabad, the people of which were more than 90% Hindus but were ruled by a Muslim nizam whose wife was the daughter of the (former) sultan of the Ottoman Empire. The Nizam of Hyderabad, who had no wish to cede his realm to the Republic of India, was renowned for his wealth and well known for his disregard of the welfare of most of the population. More than half of them were Telugu-speaking and lived in a region called Telangana. In 1947-48 Gora was active

as the vice-chairman of a committee of assistance—fund-raising, resettling refugees, and training young people to fight in an underground army—to a liberation movement among refugees from the Telangana. This movement strengthened the hand of India's tough Minister of the Interior, Patel, in persuading the Nizam in 1948 to yield to the Indian government. (Some government "police action" also helped.)

About a tenth of the refugee families in Vijayawada became atheists and, upon returning home, started an atheist center in Telangana. Some of the young people who had become acquainted with Gora in the liberation struggle then helped in his other activities, including organizing tours of the Telangana with cosmopolitan dinners and talks condemning superstitions, advocating atheism, and promoting social equality and economic justice.

In 1948 the Atheist Center bought a used printing press (of 19th-century vintage) with some type-fonts in English as well as Telugu. By November it was unpacked and set up, and in January 1949 it began to publish a journal and some books.[11] At first Gora would spend four days each week on the journal, which was entitled *Sangham* (meaning "Society") and subtitled "Atheist Telugu Weekly." He also lectured here and there in Andhra throughout 1949, and then in 1950 began to delegate some of the editorial work to Lavanam so as to have time to write his most beautiful book, *An Atheist with Gandhi*, and to give talks in other south Indian provinces and in Maharashtra. The main themes of the talks were the gradual but deliberate dismantling of the caste system (by intermarriage), a gradual reduction of economic inequalities, and the immediate

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11. Gora's books written originally in English include *We Become Atheists, An Atheist with Gandhi, Positive Atheism* and *Partyless Democracy*.

abandonment of the custom of dowries.

(Dowries had traditionally been a kind of substitute for daughters inheriting directly from their fathers, but Nehru insisted on a new law that theoretically entitled daughters, albeit only under certain circumstances,[12] to inherit just like their brothers; and after that, dowries tended to become just a way for the groom's family to extract money from the bride's family. Still today one reads, every so often in the newspapers in India, some report of a young wife's death in an "accidental" fire in the kitchen because she has not succeeded in getting her parents to satisfy her in-laws' demand for a larger dowry than the one delivered at the time of the wedding.)

In 1950 Gora met, at a public meeting where they were both on the dais, a very distinguished Telugu poet, Joshua Gurram, who was—an astonishing thing in those days for a poet—an Untouchable. They became friends and in 1951 decided that Lavanam, who was by now 20 years old, ought to marry Joshua's youngest daughter, Hemalata, who was 17. They did marry, but not until ten years later since Lavanam preferred to remain single for a while yet.

In 1950-51 Gora took up the cause of some one hundred families of Untouchable cobblers who were being made homeless in Vijayawada. For many years they had been employed by Muslim tannery-owners who had always provided them with housing on the tannery-land but who in 1948 had sold their holdings and migrated to Pakistan. The new owners of the land served eviction notices. Gora asked them to let the families remain, but they refused, so he organized the families to occupy—and build huts on—the edges of

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12. For a historical account of the intricate legal details, see J. Duncan and M. Derrett, "The Hindu Succession Act, 1956: An Experiment in Social Legislation," in the *American Journal of Comparative Law*, VIII/4 (Autumn 1959). See also www.hindu.com/mag/2005/09/25/stories/2005092500050100.htm in regard to an elaborate amendment of 2005.

a little-used road nearby. However, this road was near an up-market neighborhood where the homeowners objected to having a nearby slum. So the city ordered the demolition of the huts. Gora prevented it by (*a*) squatting for a week (together with his wife and the cobblers and their families) in front of the huts to prevent them from being torn down, and meanwhile (*b*) initiating negotiations with the municipal and district authorities. The tactic worked and after long negotiations the cobblers were allowed to stay legally until the provincial government eventually gave them, in the mid-1960s, proper housing elsewhere in the city. This was the first urban land-grant program in that part of India and it influenced the provincial government to adopt a policy of not having squatters evicted from government-owned land until alternate sites for their housing could be provided.

Chapter 7

Historical Background to Gora's Later Work

To understand Gora's work after the death of Gandhi, one has to know about certain contemporary historical developments, issues and personages in India. I will sketch this background by describing *(a)* some relevant events and political issues and *(b)* five political leaders and socio-economic reformers who in addition to Mahatma Gandhi were among Gora's friends.[13]

The events one has to know about are:

1947: The formal liberation of India from the status of a British imperial colony, and her partition into India and Pakistan.

1947-48: The "Telangana Movement" against the rule of the Nizam of Hyderabad; the beginning of a Communist-led peasant campaign of forced land-reform in that part of India; and (in 1948) the absorption of the Nizam's territories into the Republic of India (as a result of which, tens of thousands of Muslims emigrate to Pakistan).

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13. To readers wishing to know more about the historical context I recommend Ramachandra Guha's India after Gandhi (HarperCollins, 2007).

1950: The Constitution of the Republic of India comes into effect. It includes an important provision (carried over, with modifications, from the old colonial scheme) for the central authority—formerly the British Viceroy, now the Indian President—under certain circumstances to replace a democratically elected provincial government with a centrally appointed one for a period not to exceed two years (at the end of which new provincial elections must be held). This recourse in the Republic of India is called "President's Rule." The *elected* head of a provincial government is its "Chief Minister"; the potential (or, in case democracy has been temporarily replaced by President's Rule, actual) head appointed by the national President at the behest of the national Prime Minister is the "Governor" of the province.

1951: In Telangana the start of a national, voluntary land-reform movement (led by Vinoba Bhave: see below) as an alternative to the Communist-led movement for forced land-reform.

1953: The separation of the Telugu-speaking parts of Madras Presidency into a new province called "Andhra."

1956: The integration of Andhra with the Telugu-speaking parts of the old Hyderabad state—i.e. Telangana—to make a province called "Andhra Pradesh" (which is still today the same).

1959-60: The elected provincial government of Kerala is replaced for six months by President's Rule at the behest of Prime Minister Nehru in keeping with advice from his daughter, Indira Gandhi.

1964: Nehru's death.

1969: A vigorous but unsuccessful Telangana devolution movement (seeking the establishment of Telangana as a separate province).[14]

1972: A movement in other parts of Andhra Pradesh to dump Telangana from the province.[14]

1969-77: In the USA, Richard Nixon's presidency until 1974, including his anti-India "tilt" and the CIA's sponsorship in 1973 of the military coup *d'etat* in Chile causing the death of the democratically elected President there; and Henry Kissinger's service from 1973 to 1977 as Secretary of State and in the White House from 1969 to 1975 as Executive Secretary of the National Security Council.

1974: In India, the beginning of the "JP Movement" for "total revolution" (according to its idealistic leader) and against Prime Minister Indira Gandhi for doing nothing about rampant governmental corruption.

1975: Emergency Rule declared on June 26th by Indira Gandhi.

In my account it will become clear, I believe, that at issue in some of the political developments was the proper role in a parliamentary democracy (as distinct from an imperial colony or some other form of dictatorship) of such political measures as legal non-violent mass protests, illegal non-violent protests, and more or less violent ones. (For instance: what about not actually wielding arms but nonetheless encouraging the police and army to disobey

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14. This may yet happen within a few years of the time this book is published—in which case Hyderabad will be the capital of Telangana (and some other city will become the capital of Andhra Pradesh).

orders and then having an unarmed throng (*a*) blockade the building in which the head of the government is residing and (*b*) allow no one to go in or come out until the government resigns? It was when this was about to happen to the Prime Minister of India in 1975 that she declared an emergency amounting to a temporary dictatorship throughout India, imprisoned tens of thousands of her opponents, and suggested that Gora try to negotiate a settlement with their leader.) I think it was due to the complexity and sensitivity of this issue that Mahatma Gandhi, who was a great admirer of Thoreau's "On the Duty of Civil Disobedience," would sometimes exhibit nonetheless a fine sense of discrimination in referring to Thoreau's ideas. In 1909 Gandhi described Thoreau's principles as "dictated by the highest sense of duty to the State, as well as obedience to conscience." In 1921 he remarked that:

> "Thoreau was not perhaps an out-and-out champion of non-violence. Probably, also, Thoreau limited his breach of statutory laws to the revenue law, i.e., payment of taxes, whereas the term 'civil disobedience' as practiced in 1919 [in a campaign led by Gandhi in India] covered a breach of any statutory and unmoral law."

And in 1931 he equivocated as to just how important Thoreau had been to him:

> "The persons who have influenced my life as a whole in a general way are Tolstoy, Ruskin, Thoreau and Raychandbhai. Perhaps I should drop Thoreau from this list." (Letter of 17 January 1931)

The five eminent friends of Gora's that one should know about are Nehru, Vinoba, Kumarappa, Indira Gandhi and J. P. Narayan. I will describe them in that order. In doing so, I will mention some aspects of their encounters with Western culture so as to enable my reader to compare the resulting influences with some of the ways in which Gora was influenced by *his* encounters with Western culture—because it seems to me that his story is, no less than some of theirs (and indeed Mahatma Gandhi's), an instructive example of seminal cross-cultural influences.

Jawaharlal Nehru (1889-1964) was the Prime Minister of the Republic of India from its inception until his death. He was the only son, much doted upon ("Jawaharlal" means "precious jewel"), of a very rich, culturally Anglophile lawyer who under Gandhi's influence became patriotic about India soon after World War I. Jawaharlal was educated by private tutors at home, then at one of the most elite British secondary schools (Harrow), then at Cambridge University, and then in London where he earned a qualification to practice as a lawyer. (But he found that kind of work boring and soon gave it up.)

He first met Gandhi in 1916 at a meeting of the Congress. The first of his many jail terms was, in 1921-22, for his participation in the Non-Cooperation Movement that Gandhi had launched in 1920. In 1926-27 he traveled in Western Europe and also in Soviet Russia where he was feted by the ruling Party and felt inspired by the aura of egalitarianism which he thought he found there. He later told Gandhi (in a private argument):

> "No man is really unemployed in a socialistic order. Take Russia: every man [there] is a producer; he is part and parcel of the nation's wealth. You must see that in theory a certain economic structure will give you ideal conditions. We [in India] proceed towards it non-violently. Your [non-violent] approach as far as conversion is concerned [i.e. converting people to a moral outlook, not to this or that religion] is right, but you can't make a convert give up his vested interests."

Nehru's first term as President of the Congress was in 1929 and he thus presided at the raising of the prospective national flag when the delegates resolved to seek "complete self-rule."[15] Well before the provincial legislative elections of 1937 in which he proved

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15. When Nehru later became Prime Minister, the last Viceroy was so diplomatic, and his wife such a close friend, that Nehru kept India in the Commonwealth.

to be an extremely diligent and effective vote-winner for the Congress, Nehru had been chosen by Gandhi to be his political heir. Their ideas about religion, economics, Marxism, life-style, and how to cope with World War II differed very much, but they were bound to each other by mutual political need as well as by great affection, esteem and decency.

Nehru as the prospective and then the actual Prime Minister was good at working out compromises, some of them healthier than others, among the various Congress factions. He is often blamed in retrospect for some of the compromises. (But then we also rightly blame Mao Tse-Dung for his catastrophically uncompromising "Great Leap Forward" and "Cultural Revolution" in China.) Nehru's most original idea as Prime Minister was India's non-aligned status—emulated by several other countries including Burma, Indonesia, Egypt and Yugoslavia—in the ideological and political Cold War between the West and the USSR. In my opinion his worst compromise was that when the Constitution was being drawn up, he yielded, in regard to the issue of universal primary schooling, to those who were quite content for the peasants to remain illiterate. "Universal primary schooling" was allocated (in Article 45) to the "Directive Principles of State Policy" section, which outlined a set of "provisions …not enforceable in any court."

(In 2005, an amendment to the Constitution declared enforceable the right of "all children in the age group of 6 to 14" to receive education supplied "as the state [i.e. the province] may determine... by law." The practical effect of this latter phrase has proven to be somewhat analogous to that of the phrase "with all due haste" at the end of the American Supreme Court's ruling in 1954 that the public schools in the USA must be racially integrated. "With all due haste" turned out to mean "during some future decades," whereas in India the phrase "as the state may determine ...by law" was initially taken to mean that as far as poor children were concerned, the provincial governments could get away with providing, instead of primary schools with classrooms, books etc. and teachers paid

according to the established rates for public schools in India, "education guarantee centers" with no classrooms or books and with untrained teachers paid less than half the salary of a regular teacher.)

For better or worse, Nehru followed common sense in his thinking. I will cite below some examples in his responses to some of Gora's and Vinoba's initiatives. An example that is particularly relevant to certain aspects of the collaboration between Gora and Kumarappa in the 1950s was a speech, entitled "Social Aspects of Small and Big Projects," which Nehru gave in November 1958 about the "disease of gigantism" in India's economic planning. He was now thinking in a more positive way than before about "the small irrigation projects, the small industries and the small plants for electric power which," he said, would "change the face of the country more than a dozen big projects in half a dozen places." It didn't happen, because vested interests in making big profits while administering big projects continued to influence government planning (in large part because of government corruption, which Nehru never noticed: he left to others the fiscal aspects of governing); but still the speech shows that in his own thinking, common sense would characteristically outweigh ideology.

The following excerpt from another of Nehru's speeches (which some people made fun of because they went on for so long) illustrates the common-sense decency that made him in many ways a great Prime Minister:

> "We have a Muslim minority who are so large in numbers that they cannot, even if they want, go anywhere else. That is a basic fact about which there can be no argument. Whatever the provocation from Pakistan and whatever the indignities and horrors inflicted on non-Muslims there, we have got to deal with this minority in a civilized manner. We must give them security and the rights of citizens in a democratic State. If we fail to do so, we shall have a festering sore which will eventually poison the whole body politic and probably destroy it."

He showed the same decency in international dealings. When Fidel Castro visited New York in 1960 to address the U. N. General Assembly, no hotel downtown would put him up, so he went to a Harlem hotel—where (as he told an Indian friend many years later), "The first person who visited me was Prime Minister Nehru. I can never forget his magnificent gesture."

Some of Nehru's favorite lines of poetry were Robert Frost's "But I have promises to keep / And miles to go before I sleep." For quite a few years he was the most widely and deeply respected statesman in the world—and deservedly so (in my opinion) as his political leadership ensured that independent India would be a parliamentary democracy notwithstanding the dire poverty due to the former British imperial policies and to the high levels of illiteracy in the 1950s. The wife of the last imperial Viceroy loved Nehru; and even Churchill, who had openly voiced disdain for Gandhi and who in 1946 had inaugurated the Cold War, called Nehru "the jewel of Asia."

Vinoba Bhave (1895-1982) was a very devout, sweet and thin Gandhian philosopher-theologian whom many in India regarded as Gandhi's spiritual heir although Gandhi himself avoided such a designation (in contrast to his choice of Nehru as his political heir).

Vinoba joined Gandhi's ashram in north-west India in 1916, and five years later moved to a town in central India (Wardha) where he founded a branch of the ashram in response to a request by a rich devotee who had given much of his wealth to support Gandhian projects. In 1938 Vinoba started a rural ashram of his own near Wardha. Gandhi in a well-known article of 1940 described how Vinoba had "devoted the largest part of his time to spinning," had helped develop a scheme of education through handicrafts, had taken part in "every menial activity of the ashram from scavenging [cleaning up refuse] to cooking," had "abolished every trace of Untouchability from his heart," had dedicated himself to the service of lepers, and had attracted "disciples and workers who would rise to any sacrifice at his bidding," and how Vinoba believed that

"constructive work... is far more effective than the already heavily crowded political platform."

Three years after Gandhi's assassination in 1948, Vinoba became a public leader. During the Telangana Liberation Movement of 1947-48 (for liberation from rule by the Nizam of Hyderabad) the Communist cadres hoarded arms which they then used, in 1949-51, in a militant land-reform movement by which they hoped to make that part of India serve the role that Hunan had served in the Chinese Communist revolution. Nehru sent in the army to protect the land-owners and their property. Vinoba decided to tour the area—this was in April 1951—and preach non-violence, somewhat as Gandhi had toured various parts of India to quell religious violence. As he approached one of the villages, however, his way was blocked by eighty Untouchables who said they wouldn't let him pass if his intention were just to preach non-violence without doing something about the fact that they had no land. They wanted one acre each. He agreed to take up the issue, and at the meeting in the village the largest local landowner offered to donate a hundred acres to a hundred landless peasants. That night, Vinoba reckoned that an equivalent rate of donations throughout India would come to some 50 million acres, and decided to dedicate himself to that end:

> "God appeared before me and we had a dialogue. I wanted to go to [other] landlords... and ask for more land, but I was hesitating, when God intervened and said, 'Keep faith in me and go, ask for more land.' "

Thus began Vinoba's Bhoodan ("land-gift") Movement. Between then and 1964 he walked ca.65,000 kilometers from village to village in various parts of India, appealing for donations of land. In 1965-69 he focused on one of the poorest provinces, Bihar, and used a car to get about, as he was now quite old. In all, he achieved the transfer of some 2½ million acres of arable land to the ownership of hitherto landless peasants. (Another 1½ million acres proved to be non-arable or got tied up in litigation.)

It was Vinoba who coined the proverb: "Think globally, act locally."

In the mid-1950s a fear arose that since he declared in 1954 that the centenary of the 1857 uprising against the British was to be the year when the Bhoodan Movement would achieve a "land revolution," it might at that time venture beyond friendly requests into some kind of protesting against landlords who hadn't donated. These fears were conveyed to Nehru, who visited Vinoba in 1957 and persuaded him not to risk causing civil unrest. Vinoba remained for the rest of his life innocuous to landlords (and Gora criticized him on this account) while maintaining nonetheless a remarkably idealistic political philosophy of his own:

> "When people get so far prepared as to offer their all to society, we will build up a government which will not need to seek help from America, nor paper money from [a government printing] press. Every Indian home will be its bank. People will readily comply with whatever demand it may choose to make of them. People will leave all their worries to the care of society and be themselves free from any anxiety or insecurity."

(Meanwhile, the Indian Communists, toward the end of 1951 as many people were investing more hope in Vinoba's program than in their armed struggle, had given up that struggle and had taken part as a political party in the first elections of independent India. But in 1961 a small group reverted to armed activities—interfering with elections, threatening to assassinate landlords, etc.—and in 1962 a new and more militant party, the CPI(M) was founded to compete with the Communist Party of India. The CPI(M) is today larger and more powerful than the CPI. These two and some other leftist parties have often governed the two provinces of India, Kerala and West Bengal, where genuine land-reform has been achieved—and in Kerala universal primary schooling as well.)

Gora in the late 1940s had visited Vinoba now and then at his ashram, which is within walking distance (about ten kilometers) of Sevagram; and Gora and Lavanam spent most of 1955-58 working

in the Bhoodan Movement. Vinoba's share of the work was to walk and to conduct prayer meetings at the end of which he would ask the local land-owners to donate a sixth of their holdings; all the administrative details were left to assistants. During the main tour of Andhra, which was in 1955, Lavanam translated Vinoba's talks from Hindi to Telugu (the language of Andhra) but declined, because of his atheism, to translate the prayers. In response to this, Vinoba, who was steeped in religious scriptures and was thus perfectly mindful that Jesus forbade praying in public (*Matthew*, vi/5), decided to forego all kinds of public prayer other than the silent contemplation of truth, non-violence and active compassion. Gora and Lavanam saw less of Vinoba after he completed in 1958 the south-India part of the Bhoodan tour.

Vinoba returned to his ashram in 1969. He did not approve of the JP Movement (see below), but he did conduct political fasts to secure enforcement of a national law prohibiting the slaughter of cows and to prevent the main north Indian language, Hindi, from being imposed as the "link language" in south India where English is preferred for that purpose. In 1982 he decided that the time was ripe for him to die and achieved it calmly and efficiently within a few days (during which Prime Minister Indira Gandhi came from a thousand miles away to kneel at his feet) by abstaining from eating and drinking.

J. C. Kumarappa (1892-1961) was the economist in Gandhi's camp and was thus the earliest champion, among economists, of small-is-beautiful manufacturing with appropriate technology—for which he co-founded with Gandhi the pioneering research institute in 1934. In 1951 he co-founded with Gora an organization calling for changes in Nehru's capital-intensive (as opposed to labor-intensive) economic policies and undertaking to show, by integrated programs of development in selected villages, how excessive economic inequality could be alleviated in India.

He had studied accounting in London (and had worked there for an engineering firm serving the Ministry of Munitions) and, after co-

founding an auditing firm in Bombay, had earned in 1928 a graduate degree in economics at Columbia University in New York. Gandhi read his thesis and had it published in five languages. One of its findings was that whereas there had been, before the British took over, local famines in India due mainly to "shortage of grain following a drought" and to "inadequate facilities of transport... making relief work an almost insuperable difficulty," the great famines that characterized life in India under British rule were due instead to "lack of [local] purchasing power." Kumarappa later proposed, as a way of preventing too much of the grain produced in the countryside from being exported in order to make big landowners rich, that some of it be held in reserve under the care of village councils, and only the surplus sent out for its commercial value elsewhere.[16]

Gandhi in 1929 asked Kumarappa to organize and write up a detailed economic survey of one district (*ca.*50 villages). Because of this and two later such studies in other parts of India, and then a report on possible agrarian reforms (commissioned by the Congress

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16. This perspective has been developed further in Amartya Sen's famous account, *Poverty and Famines* (1981), of how six of the greatest modern famines have been due not to crop failures but to institutional failures to provide certain segments of the population with "entitlements" to food. According to Kumarappa, *laissez-faire* economics lets "the devil take the hindmost." According to Sen, "Famines can arise in overall boom conditions... if the boom takes the form of uneven expansion.... In the fight for market command over food, one group can suffer precisely from another group's prosperity, with the devil taking the hindmost." Sen points out that not only *laissez-faire* government but also dictatorship can harbour the kind of famines that are due to lack of entitlements rather than to overall shortages. The biggest famine in human history—in China in the 1960s—was of this kind; famine relief was precluded by the fact that local bureaucrats were afraid to tell their superiors what was really happening.

in 1948) for which Kumarappa solicited reams of documents from all over India and traveled thousands of miles to investigate first-hand, he became better informed than anyone else, then or since, about India's rural economy (which still today engages most of her people—and therefore I will say rather more about him than about Nehru, Vinoba *et al.*).

Kumarappa and Gandhi founded in 1934 the All-India Village Industries Association. It was the first national "small-is-beautiful" undertaking, and Kumarappa devoted most of his time to it (when not in jail) until poor health made him retreat to semi-retirement in 1953. His writings describe some of the social costs of maximizing profits in large-scale mechanized industry:

> "While the plant that transforms raw materials into consumable articles is located in some one place, the... raw materials are gathered from the places of their origin and brought together to feed the machinery... at a speed demanded by the technical requirements... for production at an 'economic speed'.... When the goods have been produced they have to be sold. Again the problems of routes, ports, steamships and political control of peoples have to be faced. Exchange, customs and other financial and political barriers have to be regulated to provide the necessary facilities. All this can be done only at the point of the bayonet."
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> "The nation pays through the nose for its armaments program, holds raw-material producers in political bondage, and sacrifices its sons. When the cost of production includes all these, who will say that centralized production is cheap?"
>
> "Work, to be healthy and beneficial to the worker, should have diversion and variety in sufficient measure in every subdivided unit of it to prevent its becoming a strain on the nerves. There is, therefore, a limit beyond which division of labor cannot go without impugning its claims to wholesomeness."

"A mill-owner... will plan on his workers leading a complex standard of existence which he will be pleased to call a 'high' standard of living.... The result of this will be that the worker... will be loath to change places even if his principles are violated by the factory owner."

He was remarkably articulate, for an economist in the first half of the 20th century, about problems of ecological depletion and its relation to international violence:

> "The world possesses a certain stock or reservoir of such materials as coal, petroleum,... iron, copper, gold etc. These, being available in fixed quantities, may be said to be 'transient', while the current of flowing water in a river or the constantly growing timber of a forest may be considered 'permanent' as their stock is inexhaustible in the service of man if only the flow or increase is taken advantage of."

> "Basing our life pattern on the economy of permanence paves the way for world peace, while the other [kind of economy, based on dwindling sources of consumable energy and raw materials,] leads to disharmony, unhealthy competition, enmity and world wars."[17]

The notion of ecosystems, though without the word, is pivotal in his best-known book, *Economy of Permanence* (the first edition of which he wrote in prison during World War II):

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17. It was due mainly to his influence that Gora would, in the early 1970s, say that "Industrialized society has consumed in a century the coal, oil and minerals which Nature took billions of years to make; it is irresponsibly selfish to leave so little for succeeding generations" and that "In order to be happy and peaceful, man has got to adjust himself with fellow men on the one hand and with natural elements like air and water on the other hand. Maladjustment is leading to war and conflict in social relations and to contamination and disease due to a defective relation to the natural surroundings. The Gandhian method of decentralization and simple living has much to contribute towards restoring harmony in man's relations with fellow men and with nature."

"In animate life, the secret of Nature's permanency lies in the cycle... by which the various factors function... to maintain the continuity of life.... Leaves fall to the ground and are... decomposed into... [the chemicals] which the... plant had absorbed from the soil... [etc.]"

His concept of "permanence" in economics was relative:

> "Human life rarely reaches even a hundred years while the unit to measure the life of Nature will run into astronomical figures.... It is in this relative sense that we speak of 'an economy of permanence'."

He was the first economist to take seriously macro-ecological pollutions and the resulting imbalances in the eco-system hosting humankind:

> "The main trouble with man arises out of the fact that he is endowed with a 'free will' and possesses a wide field for its play. By exercising this gift in the proper way he can consciously bring about a much greater cooperation and coordination of Nature's units than any other living being. Conversely, by using it wrongly he can create quite a disturbance in the economy of Nature, and in the end destroy himself."

He devised a novel theoretical scale of five types—often mixed in any one person or any one phase of social development—of economic activity. They are distinguished by characteristic attitudes: (*1*) predatory (destroying one's sources of material benefit); (*2*) parasitical (taking benefits by exercising rights, but neglecting duties and thus failing to make a positive contribution); (*3*) positively enterprising (economically creative with a sense of enlightened self-interest precluding predatory and parasitic behavior); (*4*) socialistic (with self-submission to the group's economic planning); and (*5*) service-oriented (regardless of group affiliations).

Gandhi's hope that Kumarappa would be the Republic of India's first Minister of Finance was not fulfilled, but he did serve on the eight-man Economic Program Committee appointed in 1947 to draw up a list of objectives which were then supposed to be borne in

mind by the Central Planning Commission set up in 1950 to design India's Five-Year Plans (1951-56, 1956-61 etc.). The committee completed its report in January 1948. It synthesized—thanks to Nehru's skill at formulating fuzzy compromises—the recommendations of four subcommittees one of which Kumarappa chaired. The following phrases from the report reflect the tensions between Kumarappa's approach and that of the subcommittee on "ownership, development and control of large-scale industry including transport, coordination of large-scale industry with cottage industry, [and] priorities in planning":

> "A national minimum standard in respect of the essentials of physical and social well-being, within a reasonable period. Economic organization decentralized as far as [this] is compatible with the requirement of an adequate standard of living and the country's internal and external security. Industries producing articles of food and clothing and other consumer goods [to] constitute the decentralized sector of the Indian economy and, as far as possible, [to] be developed and run on a cooperative basis [and] for the most part on cottage or small-scale basis. Larger units, inevitable in the case of heavy industries, e.g., manufacture of machinery. Choice of size [to] be determined by the net balance of economic and social advantage, preference being for smaller as against larger units. The respective spheres of large-scale, small-scale, and cottage industries [to] be demarcated as clearly as possible to avoid economic insecurity and destructive competition. Large-scale industry [to] make fullest use of cottage industries for processes which can be handled on handicraft basis without serious loss of efficiency. Large-scale industry to improve the operative efficiency of small-scale and cottage industries. Where a cottage industry is allowed to operate in the same field as large-scale mechanized industry, its output [to] be protected from the competition of the latter by subsidies or some method of price equalization, especially [in] cotton textile industry. In this and similar cases, further expansion of large-scale machine industry [to]

be restricted except where this is considered necessary. Regional self-sufficiency the aim. Not desirable to erect barriers in respect of movement of goods in the interests of regional development."

In response to a request from Nehru for his impressions of China during a visit there in 1951, Kumarappa said that the Chinese had "done amazingly well in reorganizing in a very short time the primary occupation of the nation, agriculture, that was until then in the hands of a few feudal lords. The Communist government [has] formed agricultural cooperatives all over the country." His sense of frustration that the Congress Party had failed to support land-reform in India prompted him to take a positive view of Communist economic undertakings. To the many Gandhians who criticized him for this, he replied:

> "All I have done is to appreciate the self-denying spirit, the zeal, [the] devotion to the cause of the masses, the steadfastness and earnestness of purpose and the doggedness with which they set about solving their problems. These great qualities are largely lacking in our country.... We are in full cooperation with the users of atom and napalm bombs [i.e. the USA, where those weapons were invented during World War II].... Do we raise up our holy hands and non-cooperate with them? ...Why then this 'holier than thou' attitude [toward the Communists]? We need humility and open-minded generosity."

Had he revisited China a few years later he might have observed how moral passion there had meanwhile come to be enlisted in a cruel and misguided effort of ecological destruction. He did observe that in the USSR "economic militarism... [was] driving away all freedom of thought, speech and action" and that "the overemphasis on class consciousness [had] resulted in creating an atmosphere of violence." He said:

> "People have come to realize that 'free trade' and *laissez-faire* are highways to world wars.... [Yet] do we escape cruelty and violence

under a planned economy? Turn towards [Soviet] Russia. In the history of the world, has there been a parallel to the violence generated internally by the planned economy followed by Russia? What is the sacrifice in human lives with which the set goals of economic production have been attained?... How were the stupendous public works—the great canals, the huge dams, the marvelous electricity-generating stations etc.— brought into existence?...

"Then is there no way of planning without tears? Yes, there is. But it is not centered around material production but around human personality....

"A planner should... be like a gardener. He first prepares the soil, sows the seed and waters it, and, having done his part, stands aside.... Similarly, [economic] planning should ensure wholesome conditions for the growth of human beings.... The method of starting with a predetermined output and working toward it is not the way of Nature."

In 1952 Nehru set up a national "Community Development Program" for rural India to be implemented in consultation with American advisors. The well-meaning American ambassador, Chester Bowles, was irresistibly enthusiastic in commending the idea to Nehru, but Kumarappa spoke with disdain and mistrust of the American role in the program:

"While the USA contributes [*ca.*1/8 of the cost]..., it is given a controlling voice in the affairs of the Community Projects.... If we have no funds to cover 55 projects, why not cut down the scheme by one eighth—make it 48 projects... and maintain our self-respect? ...The whole scheme reflects an amazing lack of confidence....

"[It] seems to bypass the fundamental rural question—land-reform. ...Land-reform means restoring the land to the community to be used for the general benefit of the community... [whereas] the Americans look upon land as an instrument to produce commercial goods. This latter approach leads to competition and conflict....

"...Those who are responsible for this plan have left out any need for human psychology. The Americans know no more about us than we do of the Eskimos....

> "Generally my fear is that this is the thin edge of the wedge of the era of American financial imperialism striving to fill the vacuum created by an inefficient [Indian] administration in the wake of the departure of British political imperialism."[18]

Kumarappa's last substantial essay was an eight-page report on how the program was working out in 27 villages that he visited in 1956. The report described ineffective bureaucratization, corruption, injustice (the well-to-do were the main beneficiaries of the ostensible anti-poverty measures), fresh unemployment, palpable ecological degradation, and a lack of local health-care facilities and universal primary schooling. Historians agree; I could cite quite a few of their assessments in the following vein:

> "[Nehru] created a community development program in the 1950s, funded partly with American aid. Begun with great fanfare and enthusiasm, the program soon became hopelessly bureaucratized. Like many other well-intentioned programs, it failed because Nehru did not have the patience, the managerial skills, or the passion to implement it. Nor was it Gandhian in spirit—it was 'top down' rather than 'bottom up'."

Kumarappa had also, however, advocated the use of government regulations to protect village industries from mass-production competition, and I could cite quite a few historians agreeing with the opinion, expressed in 1985 by the Prime Minister at that time, that the Indian economy had meanwhile got "caught in a vicious

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18. Between mid-1951 and mid-1968, India's external debt—mostly to the USA— grew from Rs.320 million to more than Rs.60,300 million. The political meaning of this kind of phenomenon was later explained in a book, *Confessions of an Economic Hit Man*, by John Perkins, an American agent who with covert sponsorship of the White House was dispatched to various "underdeveloped" countries to persuade them to get over their heads in debt to the USA.

circle of more and more controls" inhibiting economically productive enterprise and promoting corruption among bureaucrats.

Kumarappa criticized some aspects of Vinoba's Bhoodan Movement. One time when Vinoba called upon him, Kumarappa greeted him by saying, "Here you are, the greatest thief in India!" Vinoba politely asked what on earth he meant. Kumarappa explained that (*a*) according to the *Bhagavad Gita*, to possess more than you need without sharing it is tantamount to theft, and (*b*) a vast sum of land had been donated to Vinoba but he had, so far, neglected to see to its redistribution. (Vinoba acknowledged, in his characteristically gentle way, that the criticism was valid.) Kumarappa also advised Vinoba, in a letter:

> "I do not lay much store on [mere] distribution of land as a great deal depends on its proper utilization. Ownership should vest in the community.... I have heard of your receiving whole villages as gifts.... [They should become] demonstration centers.... To develop even these villages we need trained workers."

Gora's sojourns to Sevagram in the mid-1940s had always included visits to Kumarappa at the headquarters (not far from the nearest railway station) of the All-India Village Industries Association. I will describe below how Gora and Kumarappa co-founded in 1951 the *Arthik Samata Mandal* ("Society for Economic Equality").

Indira Gandhi (1917-1984; maiden name: Indira Nehru) was Nehru's only child, and became the Prime Minister from 1966 to 1977 and again from 1980 until her assassination four years later. (She was not related to Mahatma Gandhi, and neither was her husband; he just happened to have the same last name.)

As a child she had been frail, but when she was 12 years old had helped organize thousands of children in India to run errands in support of Independence-movement activists. In her teens she received in Switzerland some effective medical treatment against tuberculosis (of which her mother had died in 1936), and after that

was full of stamina. It was as a student in England that she met Feroze Gandhi; they were married in India in 1942, a few months before being imprisoned for a year for speaking in public against the war. Her husband was later dismayed, however (and they therefore lived apart), when she served, during her father's tenure as Prime Minister, as *his* official hostess, and then, gradually more and more throughout the 1950s, as his political confidante. She thus became thoroughly familiar with the corridors of power by the time she was elected in 1959 to a one-year term as head of the Congress Party.

When Nehru died in 1964, his successor as Prime Minister, L. B. Shastri, appointed her Minister of Information and Broadcasting, and upon Shastri's death in 1966 the Congress Party chose her to be Prime Minister as a compromise candidate between the relatively strong right wing and relatively weak left wing of the party. She was expected to be a weak doll in office, but proved to be politically tough, though obliged after the national elections of 1967 to appoint as her Deputy Prime Minister a political antagonist who was the leader of party's right wing.

In the wake of her brilliant handling of the third war between India and Pakistan (the one in 1971 that led to the founding of Bangladesh notwithstanding Nixon's and Kissinger's pro-Pakistan tilt), Indira was rated, in a 1971 Gallup Poll of Americans, the most admired person in the world. But at the same time she was tolerating rampant corruption at every level of government in India, and then (*a*) there was such high inflation that workers with inadequate wages staged many strikes (for instance, twelve thousand strikes in Bombay in 1972-73) and (*b*) the monsoon failed in 1972, '73 and '74, causing severe food- and water-shortages in many parts of India.

In January 1974, students in Gujarat (the part of India, on the northwest coast, where Gandhi had come from) protested against

the high prices of basic commodities and forced the resignation of the corrupt chief minister. That man was not closely allied with Indira in party politics, so she allowed President's rule to be imposed in Gujarat in February even though she believed that the student protesters had had CIA support. In May, she suppressed a strike by more than a million railway workers of India, and then had an underground nuclear-bomb test carried out in order to bolster her severely diminished popularity by saber-rattling *vis-à-vis* Pakistan.

At this point, the career of this once frail child of whom Kissinger said that she had "few peers in the cold-blooded calculation of the elements of power" became intertwined with that of —

Jayaprakash Narayan (1902-1979), one of the most idealistic 20th-century Indian politicians, much beloved and known throughout India as "JP."

He was from Bihar, one of the most poverty-stricken provinces of India. In the 1920s he spent seven years in the USA, supporting himself by working as a fruit-picker, a bootblack, a waiter, a salesman etc., and studying at four big state universities—first in California, then in Iowa (because of the lower fees there), then in Wisconsin, where he became a Communist, and finally in Ohio (because his Communist mentor got a job there) where he took his B.A. and M.A. degrees, won a prize for his M.A. thesis, and taught sociology. During the last year and a half of his absence his wife was in the personal care of Gandhi and Kasturba, and decided, without consulting her husband, to maintain lifetime chastity. (He eventually accepted the idea; she overlooked in later years an occasional lapse on his part.) She was a close friend of Gandhi's wife and of Nehru's; JP himself was like a family member to the Nehrus and thus an uncle to Nehru's daughter Indira.

JP's graduate studies in the USA ended when his mother died in 1929; it was his duty to attend her funeral, and he didn't have the

funds to pay for a trip back to the USA. He took part in Gandhi's civil-disobedience movement of 1931 and then, after spending a year in prison and after resigning from the Communist Party of India because of Stalinism, co-founded in 1934 a Socialist wing of the Indian National Congress. He took a leading part in the Indian labor-union movement, and, like virtually every Marxist in those days, took a dim view of the All-India Village Industries Association when it was founded. He said:

> "Prof. Kumarappa has confused the economic issues in the present world by posing the problem as centralization versus decentralization. The problem in reality is private versus social ownership of the means of production.... Decentralization... is a reactionary step and also an illusory hope. It is reactionary because it turns back the productive forces of society. It is illusory because not having a class basis it cannot materialize. Furthermore, it means lower standards of living for the people. It means scientific and cultural reaction. It means a medieval and rural outlook. It means military weakness."

Gandhi had high regard for JP notwithstanding their disagreements. In 1999, a German who in the mid-1930s had gone to India to work for Gandhi told me about a conversation in Hindi between Gandhi and JP that he had witnessed back then. It went like this: Gandhi would say a few sentences; JP would exclaim "Nahi, Bapu!" ("No, Father!") and argue to the contrary; Gandhi would make a reply; JP would exclaim, "Nahi, Bapu!" and mount another counter-argument; and so on. When the discussion was over and JP had taken his leave, Gandhi told the young German that JP was "our most devoted and patriotic colleague."

In 1942 JP was yet again imprisoned—this time for speaking out against India's participation in World War II—but made a dramatic and famous escape from jail and became, until his recapture a year later, a leader of the underground struggle against imperial British rule in India. (It may have been due to an instruction ultimately from JP that young Lavanam went about cutting telegraph

and telephone wires.) Released from prison in 1946, he soon became disillusioned with the Congress Party and co-founded an independent Socialist Party in 1948—but then, having gradually become dissatisfied altogether with party politics and Marxist ideology, decided in 1954 to devote the rest of his life to Vinoba's Bhoodan Movement. (A hint of his impending conversion to Gandhian ideology was a telegram he sent to Kumarappa in 1952, the entire text of which was: "Most warmly welcome.") JP's charisma in India was now so great that if he had not committed himself to the Bhoodan Movement he might have succeeded Nehru as Prime Minister in 1964.

In 1969 when Vinoba retired to his ashram, JP became in effect the leader of the Bhoodan Movement. But in 1974 he re-entered politics (though not as a candidate for election) in order to give leadership to a student protest movement in his native province of Bihar. The objectives were to oust the corrupt Chief Minister of Bihar, who owed his position to Indira, and to force the Government to dissolve the provincial legislative Assembly and hold new elections in the province. JP led a week-long general strike during which a throng of protesters surrounded the Assembly building in the hope that such a vigorous gesture would crown their movement with success.

The joyful impetus of this effort prompted JP now to lead a national protest campaign for "total revolution."[19] In November (1974) he and Indira met for some 90 minutes but failed to reach a compromise. In February (1975) he called on the army and police to disobey "illegal or unjust" orders. In March he led a vast

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19. The Gandhi Peace Foundation supported the Movement (and therefore lost, after Indira was re-elected Prime Minister, its financial support from the government).

demonstration in New Delhi and called upon her to resign. Then in mid-June a provincial court ruled that because of some minor election-campaign malpractices, her victory in 1971 had been invalid. She appealed to the Supreme Court of India, which announced on June 24th that she could temporarily continue to perform certain of her functions as Prime Minister pending the Court's ruling on her appeal. If she were to win the appeal she would still have to seek re-election the following March; but JP thought the election would be rigged, so he called for massive demonstrations throughout India. A march of thousands of people to her residence was planned for the next day, and JP's top lieutenant in the Movement—Indira's long-time antagonist, the right-wing former Deputy Prime Minister—told an eminent journalist that they would surround the house and prevent anyone from going in or coming out until she resigned "for good": "The lady won't survive this movement of ours." Indira—having a low opinion of JP's political judgment, and fearing not only chaos throughout India but also (she later said) that since Nixon had loathed her and since Kissinger was still working in the White House, she might meet a fate like that of Salvator Allende in Chile[20]—responded by having JP and his allies arrested in their homes during the night and, with pro-forma approval of her cabinet the next morning, declaring a national Emergency on the grounds that the JP Movement was instigating an armed rebellion. Meanwhile, someone—either she or her ham-fisted son, Sanjay—had the courts in Delhi locked to prevent them from functioning, and electric current was cut off to the media in Delhi to prevent them from functioning until systematic censorship could be imposed.

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20. An elderly friend of mine who was very active in New Delhi in the JP Movement has told me that CIA agents were indeed supporting it there—and KGB agents doing their best for Indira.

JP's health deteriorated so much in jail that when Indira lost the next national election (after postponing it for a year during the Emergency[21]) to a new political party supported by JP, he was far too frail to serve as Prime Minister. But he did visit her—and told her not to lose heart, it was her duty to go on serving the people as a politician (i.e. operating not as a dictator but within the norms of parliamentary democracy). She wept—and took his advice.

He died in 1979. The new party had meanwhile performed rather worse than the Congress, and Indira and the Congress were voted back into power in 1980 with a substantial parliamentary majority.

Gora and JP may have met in the late 1930s when JP occasionally came to Gora's part of India to promote his socialist wing of the Congress. They became friends in the 1940s, and JP warmly approved of Manorama's marriage. Upon joining the Bhoodan Movement he urged Gora to do so as well (and Gora did). JP's commitment to Vinoba was such that he did not join Gora in criticizing Vinoba's compromise with Nehru in 1957. When JP later re-entered politics and took up cudgels against Indira, Gora, though subscribing to many of the ideals of the JP Movement, criticized this tactic and said that removing Indira would not solve the problem of corruption. I think history supports the view that the JP Movement degenerated into a reckless exercise of populism.

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21. There is a fascinating but quite unconfirmed rumor that halfway through that year, Vinoba may have told Indira that if she didn't let the election proceed within six months, he would speak out against her. (I have confirmed that he liked to jest that the leadership of the Bhoodan Movement included a saint, *namely JP*, and a politician, meaning Vinoba himself.) If he did indeed deal with Indira in that way, one reason may have been that he considered the agreement which he had made with her father in 1957(see above in my discussion of Nehru) to have been a mistake, as Nehru had been, in effect, unable to make good on his part of the bargain. However, a good reason for Indira's decision was undoubtedly the fact that all her Western friends were urging her to call an end to the Emergency.

Chapter 8
Gora's Political Activism in the 1950s and '60s

At mid-century Gora was, after his radiant success in Müdunur and friendship with Gandhi, among the very many people in India who had grand hopes for the future (notwithstanding the horrors of the partition carving out Pakistan from what had formerly been parts of India). In the next two decades, however, the balance between radiant success and wry frustration in Gora's political work in India was to tip a little too much the wrong way.

In 1950 he founded, with encouragement from Kumarappa, the first post-Liberation political venture by Gandhians,[22] the *Gandhi Sangham*. ("Sangham" means "association.") Some of the Gandhian constructive workers considered it an unnecessary and mistaken venture. It was intended to be a nonpartisan "people's organization" for assessing the performance of the various elected officials. Its main focus was on "economic equality," which had

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22. Later in the same year, Gandhians inspired by Vinoba founded some important social-work organizations.

been Item 13 in Gandhi's "Constructive Program." By "equality" the Gandhians meant lessening the inequalities. Vinoba's metaphor for it was the fingers of the hand being somewhat different in size because of their different functions; this fit in nicely with the theoretical ideal of the caste system. Gora's metaphor was that a mother can give equal status to all her children without obliging them to eat exactly the same amounts of each food.

The Gandhi Sangham called for "pomplessness" in government, which Gora regarded as an indispensable complement to land-reform and "socialism." By "socialism" he meant: "from each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs"—a goal which he said might be achieved by legislation if and only if the legislators themselves subscribed to a modest way of life.

After organizing preliminary meetings in various villages in the name of the Gandhi Sangham, Gora held in February 1951 a "Gandhi Sangham Conference" in a city *ca*.50 km northeast of Patamata. Some 300 delegates attended from various provinces of south India and from Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh (the most populous province in the north), and an executive committee was set up, with Gora as chairman.

He also held in June (1951) a smaller conference of Telugu-speaking atheists, at which a modest organization called *Nasthik Sangham* was founded. The memberships of the two associations—the Gandhi Sangham and the Nasthik Sangham—differed a lot because most of the Gandhians weren't atheists and most of the atheists weren't Gandhians.

Early in 1952 Gora was a candidate in the first elections for the Indian national parliament. His purpose was not to win the seat in New Delhi but to promote three radical concepts: (*1*) Competing candidates should occasionally speak from the same platform on the same occasion about their diverse views. (*2*) They should answer questions from the audience. (*3*) Their life-styles should resemble

those of most of the people they were to represent; they should have modest salaries, travel third-class, etc.

In the provincial elections that year (1952) in Andhra, the Communists were even more successful than the Congress (41 seats for the Communists, 40 for the Congress). In the internal CPI power-struggles ensuing from this success, some Andhra Communists resigned from the Party, and one of them—a former student and constant supporter of Gora's who had won a seat in the provincial legislature of Andhra—asked him in 1953 to found a non-partisan "United People's Movement." Four other former Communist members of the legislature (along with one Socialist) supported it. The eight "United People's Movement" legislators voluntarily accepted 10% reductions of their salaries, and in December (1953) introduced a bill which was passed (by a one-vote majority of those present) to cut all the provincial ministers' salaries in half. But then the governor vetoed the bill, and when the legislature reconsidered it the various party whips ensured that it was defeated.

(All the "United People's Movement" candidates for the provincial legislature were to lose their seats, albeit by very narrow margins, in the elections of 1955. In those elections the Congress Party swept to victory in Andhra as elsewhere; and the Communists lost 32 of their 41 seats in the provincial legislature.)

Gora had meanwhile issued, at a conference at the Atheist Center in May 1952, a 28-page booklet entitled (in Telugu) "Economic Equality and Democracy," and had renamed the Gandhi Sangham *Arthik Samata Mandal* ("Economic Equality Society"; often referred to by the initials ASM)—a name more issue-oriented than "Gandhi Sangham" and therefore, he hoped, more competitive with the Marxists' approach to land reform. Kumarappa was, because of his national stature, designated president of ASM, and Gora its executive secretary. Its initial manifesto began:

"In the last five years the conditions of the masses have gone from bad to worse... [but] our erstwhile colleagues [i.e. activists in the Independence movement] who had taken possession of the government and the palaces of Delhi have vied with each other to maintain... pomp, glory and splendor.... A deep feeling of frustration pervades the country..."

—and went on to say that land-reform was needed. This might have been achieved in any of three ways: (*1*) peasants more or less spontaneously seizing control of the land, (*2*) the landlords donating it to them, (*3*) legislative mandate and executive enforcement. Gandhi in the early 1940s had expected it to happen in the first way, once British imperial rule would end. Vinoba championed the second way. In regard to the third way, there were two tactical questions: (*1*) Should *satyagraha* be used as a pressure-tactic to bring about legislation? (*2*) If legislation were passed but poorly implemented, should *satyagraha* then be applied? Vinoba's answers to both of the questions proved to be negative. He would, for instance, declare, "Let the legislators do their duty" but he would never press them to do it. Gora's answers differed.

At the end of 1952 Gora replaced his atheist periodical, *Sangham*, with a new one (also in Telugu), *Arthik Samata*, which was to last for six years. ASM's national prospects looked bright for a while notwithstanding Gora's avowed atheism, but then faded when Vinoba took his Bhoodan Movement in 1953 to JP's native province of Bihar, and JP, in a dramatic and famous rejection of Marxist revolutionary thinking, became his ardent disciple. More people vested hope in the "spiritual" Vinoba than in the "rational" Gora.

Gora's activities through 1955 were mainly for ASM, and during the rest of the 1950s he would only now and then give a talk on atheism while most of his work would focus on social, economic and political issues.

There was now an elected provincial government. Whenever its ministers visited Vijayawada, he would request them in

advance to travel third-class, to visit the slums, and to have their salaries reduced; and whenever they left Vijayawada—this happened more than a dozen times—he would bring a small group to the railway station to try to hinder them (albeit non-violently) from getting into the first-class compartment. The police would detain the protesters until the train departed, and the newspapers would report the incident the next day. Eventually, two of the provincial ministers (out of a total of twenty) did take to going third-class, and upon arriving in Vijayawada would present Gora with their ticket in a photo-op which the newspapers would duly take advantage of. And the provincial governor was eventually badgered into visiting the slums of Vijayawada—after which he and successive governors made it a routine feature of their visits to various cities to spend a few hours in the slums receiving petitions.

Yet the growth of local support for ASM was meanwhile hindered by the fact that the Telugu-speaking parts of Madras Presidency became, in October 1953, a new province, "Andhra." It was the first linguistically-based province of India, and such great things were expected of it that many people thought there would be no great need for ASM-type work.

In 1954 the Socialist Party of India (which JP had founded in 1948) organized in Andhra a land-reform effort in a village where the surrounding fields were owned by absentee Brahmin landlords who got between a quarter and a half of the produce. The tillers, whose ancestors had tilled the same land for a long time, demanded title to it; the landlords tried to bring in scabs from other villages; the traditional tillers obstructed their arrival and occupied the land non-violently. At this point Gora sent Saraswathi to organize the women of the community to join in the effort. This strengthened the resistance and won the attention of the provincial government, which legislated in favor of the tillers whose parents, grandparents etc. had worked the same land. They won title to it in 1955.

Meanwhile the Bhoodan Movement had became renowned throughout India because JP had joined it and because Vinoba declared in 1954 that the centenary of the 1857 "mutiny" against the British was to be the year of a "land revolution" which would somehow be the climax of the Movement (but which he did not define more precisely). This was such an inspiring message that by 1956 some ten thousand activists, including Gora, had joined the effort.

Gora expected that Vinoba would call for non-violent protests in 1957 to express the peasants' demands for land reform and other progressive measures; but that same prospect frightened many landowners and Congress Party politicians. Nehru conferred with Vinoba in 1957 and the result was an arrangement whereby Nehru directed the government bureaucracy to collaborate with Bhoodan volunteers in "rebuilding" villages regardless of whether additional land donations were made or not made, and Vinoba for his part refrained from calling for any protests against land owners or the government.

Some of the young Bhoodan volunteers who had expected more of Vinoba looked now to Gora to provide a more militant kind of leadership. Part of his response was a radiantly hopeful book, published initially in English (1958) and soon in Hindi translation as well, entitled "Why Gram-Raj." (*Gram-raj* means "village [self-] rule.") The book drew upon an analogy between an extended Indian family and a village holding its property in common:

> "Sacrifice and sympathy... [are] not altogether a new tendency in human affairs.... But in the course of civilization such a tendency remained confined mostly to the narrow limits of families, whereas greed and selfishness have been the dominant factors in relationships with neighbors.... Everyone practices the two methods at once, because he is a member of a family as well as the neighbor of others. The essential difference between the family method and the other lies in the nature of property relations. In the case of a family, the property is

owned in common by all the relatives; they improve the family property by joint effort, and share and enjoy its fruits."(pp.3-8)[23]

A complementary argument was that the system of private property "incites its votaries to exploit... others by hook or crook."(p.12) Gora admitted that "greed, callousness and cruelty... sometimes filter into families and disturb their harmony", but he believed that for the most part, "the anti-social tendencies of fraud, greed and violence are... associated with the method of competition" and "cannot be avoided unless private property is abolished and an alternative [kind of] security is established in the form of common ownership of property."(p.12) He said:

> "The family, on account of its smallness, affords good freedom; but the very smallness renders it incapable of economic self-sufficiency. Socialist dictatorship, on the other hand, is large enough to afford food for all, but on account of its largeness it becomes dictatorial and curtails the freedom of the individual. *Gram-raj*... strikes the golden mean."(pp.32-33)

He criticized as follows Gandhi's concept of "trusteeship":

> "No one need be a caretaker of fellow-men lest, as experience has shown, the greed in him would turn him into an exploiter or a dictator that he was not before."(p.48)

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23. My page-references are to a subsequent edition. (In all editions, the page numbers are nearly the same.) This book by Gora addresses cogently some of the issues in regard to which, 40-50 years later, researchers such as Ernst Fehr, Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, using the terms "strong reciprocity," "community governance" and "crowding out," published quantitatively demonstrable findings. See Gintis, Bowles, Fehr and Robert Boyd, ed., *Moral Sentiments and Material Interests. The Fundamentals of Co-operation in Economic Life* (MIT Press, 2005). See also Alfie Kohn, *The Brighter Side of Human Nature. Altruism and Empathy in Everyday Life* (Basic Books, 1990).

He said the welfare-state "is akin to trusteeship... and requires such... heavy taxation as would make it virtually a dictatorship" as it attempts "to mitigate the evils of private property and to maintain a harmonious balance between the rich and poor."(p.53)

He took a dim view of political parties:[24]

> "Like the priest between the innocent believer and his incomprehensible god,... the political party functions as a middleman between the common citizen and his power-ridden government.... Seldom does a middleman rise above the profit motive, especially when middlemanship is a profession."(p.51)

His views in regard to machines and work and leisure were mostly the same as Kumarappa's. He said:

> "Leisure and work become distasteful if one is divorced from the other. Work is best enjoyed when it is done leisurely. So instead of hurrying with a machine, working leisurely is an alternative which *gram-raj* adopts."(p.58)

He admitted that certain kinds of machines "are useful aids to civilization and are not only indispensable but should be improved and widely employed too"; but even so, he suggested that villages "which have to utilize their manpower as well as their material resources" should not "encumber themselves with needless

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24. The following is translated from Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Du contrat social* (1762), Book II, Chapter 3:

> "There is often a lot of difference between the will of all and the general will; the latter regards only the common interest; the former regards private interest and is only a sum of particular wills: but [if you] take away from [the set of] these same [particular] wills the pluses and minuses that cancel out among them, [then] the general will remains as the sum of the differences.
>
> "If, when a sufficiently informed people [were to] deliberate, the citizens [were to] have [during the process of deliberating] no communication among themselves, the general will would always

machinery. Machine is the servant of man, and man must use it as a servant; it should not be allowed to create either unemployment or unnecessary leisure."

In a three-page section on *satyagraha* at the end of a revised edition of the book (1960) he suggested that it be used in

> "programs of ridding a [provincial or national] government of political parties and of reducing [the] pomp of people's representatives... [since] party and pomp are creating a wide gulf between [the] people and their representatives who hold power.... When the distance is reduced, the representatives can be kept under the control of [the] people."

In addition to making use of this book in dozens of "study camps" throughout most of India, he led a series of marches and *satyagraha*s in south India in the name of the Arthik Samata Mandal and in north India in the more vigorous-sounding name of a new *Satyagraha Samaj*.

Would political parties ever achieve land reform? The most powerful one was the Congress, many of whose local leaders were landlords.

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result from the grand number of differences, and the deliberation would always be good. But when factions are made—partial associations at the expense of the whole—[then] the will of each of these associations becomes general in relation to its members but particular in relation to the State; it may then be said that there are no longer as many votes as [there are] men, but only as many [votes] as associations. The differences become less numerous and give a less general result. Finally, when one of these associations is so big that it prevails over all the others, the result is no longer a sum of small differences, but a single difference; thus there is no longer any general will, and the will which prevails is only a particular one.

"It is therefore important, in order to have the general will well expressed, that there should be no partial societies in the State [i.e. no political parties], and that each citizen should express only his own opinion...."

Where it had a decisive majority, it might choose not to do anything; where its majority was frail, the opposition parties might prevent it from doing anything effective. In the end, what happened was that ostensible land-reform laws were passed by various provincial legislatures but were actually implemented only in the two provinces, West Bengal (in the north) and Kerala (in the south), where the Communists governed.[25] In those provinces the achievement was made only after a lot of strife. It was in hopes of mitigating the strife in Kerala that Gora spent several weeks there in 1958-59.

A Communist-led front in Kerala (developed by the CPI after pondering their losses in the 1955 elections in Andhra) had won a legislative majority in the 1957 provincial elections and had begun not only to implement land-reform but also to regulate the private schools owned and operated by powerful religious organizations: the Roman Catholic Church, the Muslim League and some analogous Hindu institutions. The Congress in Kerala made tactical political alliances with those religious organizations to oppose the reforms. In January 1959 Indira Gandhi became President of the Indian National Congress; in April she visited Kerala, approved of these alliances, and criticized vigorously the elected Communist government, accusing it of taking its orders from China. The Communists reacted by using illegal and sometimes violent means to "liquidate" the Congress Party at the local level. In June Indira

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25. The following data are extracted from Table 4 in the best history of the Republic of India, Ramachandra Guha's *India after Gandhi* (2007; see pp. 227-28):

Sizes of agricultural holdings in India:	Percentages of holdings:		Total percentages of farmland in such holdings:	
	1953-54	1959-60	1953-54	1959-60
less than four hectares:	85%	82%	34%	39%
more than four hectares:	15%	18%	66%	61%

told a newspaper correspondent: "As Congress President, I intend to fight them [the Communists] and throw them out," and her father visited the capital of Kerala, Trivandrum, and was shocked by the atmosphere there of "near hysteria with 'thick walls of group hatred'." He asked the chief minister to call fresh elections immediately (i.e. without serving the five-year maximum allowed after his victory in 1957), but the chief minister refused. In July Nehru had President's Rule invoked to replace the elected provincial government with temporary rule (for several months) by a governor appointed from New Delhi. (Since Indira had suggested to Nehru that he do it, some historians regard this act of his as the first strong evidence of a tendency in her, which was to become clear in later years (see below), to react with authoritarian measures when stirred by fear of political instability.)

It was during this crisis that Gora went to Kerala and toured the whole province, in the name of Arthik Samata Mandal and with the support of the local Gandhian organizations, calling for "partyless democracy"[26] and leading marches with two flagpoles. All the party flags were on one pole, while the other one, with no flag on it, symbolized citizens who had no party affiliation. The idea was that the local village councils could work without political parties.

On the way home from Kerala in November (1959), Gora met with Joshua in Madras where he was working for All-India Radio, and they decided to renew the idea of Lavanam and Hemalata marrying. Lavanam agreed, and the wedding took place in January (1960) at Sevagram and was followed by receptions in Calcutta, Hyderabad, Agra, Lucknow and several other towns and villages.

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26. The term "partyless democracy" goes back to a book, *Party, Power and Politics*, by an eminent Indian ex-Communist and former member of Congress, M. N. Roy, who may or may not have got it from Rousseau (see note 24).

For the one in Vijayawada, Vinoba, who was on a footmarch in North India, sent a message saying (in Hindi):

> "Gora is a philosopher of the category of Acharya Sankara [the greatest Hindu monotheistic philosopher, who had lived 1100 years before]. He not only preaches revolution but also practices it to the core. His sacrifice knows no bounds. He has even sacrificed God. Lavanam is the personification of the sacrifices made by Gora. Lavanam is a jewel. He has earned a permanent place in my heart."

In 1961 Gora started a primary and secondary school at Patamata, with Hemalata and Mythri as the main teachers. The number of students grew from about 20 at the beginning to about 150 at the time of Gora's death 14 years later.

In the coastal province of Tamil Nadu just south of Andhra Pradesh, Gora took part in the early 1960s in a Gandhian protest to force temple landlords to cede some of their agricultural holdings to the tillers. The protesters served month-long jail terms but to a large extent obtained their objective in the mid-'60s.

Most of Gora's work in the early '60s, however, was to oppose the use of party blocs and "whips" in the legislatures of India. Most of the Telugu-speaking parts of India had been formally joined together in 1956 to constitute the province of Andhra Pradesh, with its capital at Hyderabad. Gora's popular support was strongest in Andhra Pradesh, so he organized first, early in 1960, a march from Vijayawada to Hyderabad—giving talks in every village along the way, holding press conferences in the towns—demanding this reform in the provincial legislative Assembly. The marchers were ten in all. Gora preferred a small group so that the villages along the way could readily accommodate them and, even more important, because he felt that by being selective he could ensure that the discipline of his method as an instrument of democracy would not be destroyed by provocateurs. The marchers carried the same kind of bundle of party banners and pole with no banner as in Kerala the year before.

They arrived in Hyderabad at the end of February, marched around the city for a week holding talks and rallies, and then headed for the Legislative-Assembly building, whereupon they were arrested and taken to a police station. Within an hour, news of this caused an uproar on the floor of the Assembly, and the Speaker of the House asked the police to release the detainees and extend to Gora an invitation to meet him at his home that evening. In their private discussion he said that he agreed with Gora in principle but that the real problem lay in the example set by the national parliament: Gora should march *there*. The next day a national-parliament member from Karnataka (another province of South India) came to Hyderabad—having heard on the radio about the arrest and having taken the night train—and pledged his support in the national parliament for Gora's proposal. Gora organized in August a "national conference" on this issue (inaugurated formally by JP) at Hyderabad, and then four other such conferences in the other south Indian provinces, and then a 1000-mile march, from October 1961 to January '62, of fifteen cadres, from Sevagram to New Delhi. He had meanwhile, in October 1960, staged a public fast at an All-India Congress Committee conference in central India against political partisanship and corruption (which was growing at an alarming rate in Nehru's later years due in large part to the fact that only one party—the Congress—had been in power in Delhi ever since 1947).

The banner for the march to Delhi was in Hindi and promoted two issues: "partylessness" and "pomplessness" (the latter term implying criticism of the luxurious living conditions of most of India's political leaders). On the way north, ten additional marchers were added so that most of India's provinces were represented by they time they arrived in New Delhi. They blocked the entrance to the lovely grounds surrounding Nehru's vast and luxurious official residence. An emissary emerged with an offer from Nehru to meet with the whole group for ten minutes or else discuss the relevant issues for an hour with two of their representatives. The group

opted for the second choice and stopped blocking the gate; the emissary drew Gora aside and told him diplomatically that Nehru had read all his letters with interest, was personally glad about the march because of its educational value, and was looking forward to the discussion the next day. In the discussion, Nehru said that he did indeed appreciate the public educational value of the march, that he would respond positively to the request to live modestly if and when Gora could show that India's people no longer needed displays of majestic pomp in order to respect their government, and that he, Nehru, sympathized personally with the call for partyless democracy, and would really prefer to govern in a non-partisan way, but that he was, alas, dependent on the Congress Party.

Gora went back to south India and campaigned in Karnataka for three weeks in February (1962) for the re-election of the "partyless" national parliament member who had taken the overnight train to Hyderabad; and the candidate was re-elected. In June Gora put on a big conference in Calcutta on the same theme, and meanwhile his book, *Partyless Democracy*, which he had written the year before in hopes of having it ready in time for the march to Delhi, was published in English[27] and in Hindi translation. Among his philosophical books this one appeals to me perhaps most (although I think that in large-scale politics the best one can hope for is responsible collaboration between members of different parties). My abstract of it is as follows:

> Good social relations can readily be maintained if people are socially conscious and self-disciplined, but greed and hate occasionally prevent this from happening, so social organization has to restrain lapses of self-discipline. An early way of doing it was by means of

27. A note in the second edition (1985) says that the book was originally published in 1961, but this is factually incorrect.

religious beliefs; a later way, by means of secular governmental authority. But alas, political power, no less than religious faith, lends itself to misuse, and even though democracy is more natural and reasonable than autocracy (since humans resemble one another in strength, talent and basic needs), it is one thing to overthrow an autocratic rule and quite another to establish a democratic regime in its place. A type of social order suiting the current state of affairs in this regard has been found in parliamentary democracy: government by the elected representatives of the people instead of by the people themselves. Three conditions for the success of parliamentary democracy are (*1*) a political outlook among the people, (*2*) a modicum of social and economic equality, and (*3*) small constituencies enabling the relation between the citizens and their representatives to be close and vital (and thereby helping people improve their social consciousness and self-discipline). The democracies that have emerged to date are still far from satisfying these conditions. Political parties have taken up the challenge of building democracy, but have turned politics into power-politics, which, instead of encouraging people in the early stages of democracy, has aroused their disgust. Yet there will be parties for some time to come and therefore each candidate for election will have a party affiliation; but even so, if elected he should disaffiliate himself from his party, because he will then represent those who opposed him as well those who voted for him. Also, legislators and cabinet ministers should draw salaries and allowances totaling no more than five or six times the average income of their constituents, and their code of conduct should be more stringent than that of ordinary citizens.

I should mention, because it led (though indirectly) to Gora's travels abroad, the Delhi-Peking International Friendship March which the Gandhi Peace Foundation helped organize in reaction to the October 1962 border war between India and China. On the anniversary in January 1963 of Gandhi's assassination, sixteen marchers from five countries set out from the site of his cremation.

The march ended a year later near the border where they had waited hopefully for three months for Chinese visas which were never granted to them.[28] One of them was Lavanam, and he thereby became friends with an energetic Quaker from Philadelphia, George Willoughby, who consequently arranged for him and Vijayam and Nau each to study in the USA (and to whom this book is dedicated).

Gora meanwhile tried to do something in Andhra Pradesh about "pomplessness" even though "partylessness" was proving an elusive goal. This time his public protest would focus, not on the legislators as in his 1960 march, but on the chief minister, the top elected official of the province (equivalent to an American governor), who was a friend and admirer of his; and this time he prepared thoroughly for the gesture that would court arrest. When in September (1963) he and a dozen supporters (including Saraswathi and three other women) "squatted," day and night, in front of the chief minister's formal residence, hundreds of supporters throughout the province held public meetings and sent telegrams of support, while the Hyderabad newspapers published articles and photographs. The chief minister, who was a well-seasoned politician, let the support for Gora's cause build up for five days and then issued a public statement asking the squatters to end their protest and offering, in that case, to meet with Gora, Vinoba and the chief ministers of the three neighboring provinces in order to draw up some constructive measures with a view to having them adopted nationally in due course. So, Gora terminated the protest, met with the chief minister,

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28. The idea of putting on such a long march was initiated by a "World Peace Brigade" founded by A. J. Muste *et al.* in 1962. The Gandhi Peace Foundation had been set up that same year. Its board of trustees included Nehru as well as Bertrand Russell and Albert Einstein. Its most notable achievement was to stimulate John Kennedy to have the USA negotiate with the USSR a nuclear-weapons test-ban treaty that was signed a year later.

and sent a letter to Vinoba—who, however, declined to help, on the grounds that he had nothing special to contribute, they could carry on without him. This was a shock to everyone who had expected leadership from Vinoba. Later the Andhra chief minister circulated a letter to the other three, soliciting their ideas, and Gora wrote to the President of the Indian National Congress, but then the Andhra chief minister resigned his office in order to take a position in the national cabinet; the new chief minister was unsympathetic to the effort; and the Congress President took the opportunity to back out of it.

Gora kept on trying with the new chief minister—letters, squatting (in September 1964), negotiations, etc. The outcome was a set of regulations, issued in October, ordering that (*1*) the provincial ministers shun lavish dinners during their official travels in Andhra Pradesh; (*2*) the Andhra Pradesh Department of Agriculture grow more fruit-trees in government-office compounds (instead of merely decorative flowers, which Gora considered a form of stately pomp; the trees are still there); and (*3*) two-thirds of the flowers in the gardens surrounding the chief minister's official residence be replaced with vegetables. Gora was not against flowers, but only against their subsidized cultivation in a society where many people were going hungry. In the spirit of this initiative, vegetables were planted on the strips of land surrounding government offices throughout Andhra (low-paid government employees were to harvest and eat the vegetables) and several of the ministers undertook to receive only fruits rather than flower-bouquets at public functions (a reform often adhered to at Gandhian functions throughout India today). To spread the idea that a nation with famines and malnutrition should make it a high priority to reduce them, Gora organized at Vijayawada in November 1965 a "Grow More Vegetables" rally sponsored jointly by ASM and the provincial government and attended by about 1000 people. At this rally some saplings of fruit-trees were planted in a public park and two provincial ministers

promised to decline in future any flower garlands and to request instead a piece of fruit (which they would then give away to a child in the crowd) or a garland of vegetables (which would then be cooked). For two or three years after that, all the state ministers in Andhra observed this custom, but then Hindu tradition and the vested interests of flower-garland producers, whom one can still find today in any Indian city making and vending their wares, gradually got the upper hand.

It was in 1963 that Gora had invented the custom (maintained for the rest of his life) of bestowing vegetable garlands—pieces of carrot, cauliflower etc. on a cord—instead of flowers at public meetings and on festive occasions; then the garland would be handed over to a cook who would use it to make a curry.

Gora spent much of 1965-66 in Kerala promoting his concept of partyless democracy. The situation there was again rather like it had been in 1959, and the Gandhians asked him to return and lead a campaign throughout the province. Part of the plan this time was to publish, starting in January 1966, an English-language journal (edited by Gora) entitled "Partyless Democracy." A liberal-minded Christian in a predominantly Roman Catholic town, Kottayam, contracted to print it, but then reneged because he feared an economic boycott led by his priest. So only four issues, prepared on a poorly equipped press belonging to a local Hindu, appeared.

In 1967 Gora was a candidate for the Vijayawada seat in the provincial legislature. As in 1952, his purpose was merely to promote some of his radical ideas about the political process. This time he was able to get the Congress Party candidate (who won the seat) to discuss some of the issues face-to-face with other candidates at a public meeting.

In March 1968 he organized in Hyderabad a "Voters' Week" (with meetings in a different neighborhood each day) propagating his political themes and the Gandhian concept of constructive work.

As a modest example of constructive work for town-dwellers he suggested that in their private gardens they replace the flowers with vegetables. He said: "We can't leave everything to the government, we have to do something constructive ourselves."

However, that week of consciousness-raising was also in preparation for his next political protest. The provisions of the 1964 agreement which he had negotiated with the chief minister had been implemented enthusiastically for a while, but were now being ignored, so Gora notified that good man that a group of protesters would on a certain day in mid-March uproot some of the (theoretically illegal) flowers in the public garden opposite the state-legislature building, and plant fruits and vegetables in their place. The chief minister had the 22 protesters arrested and jailed for destroying government property. They of course declined to post bail, as their whole purpose was to drum up publicity for their cause. The tactic worked. In the state legislature the face-saving argument was advanced that since Gora was a botanist his advice about plants should of course be followed; so, the case was dropped, the prisoners were released (after a month during which the jailors had become their friends and had suggested, to no avail, that they simply walk out and let the government forget about them; instead they grew vegetables in the prison yard), and the Agriculture Department re-introduced vegetables and fruit-trees in the public gardens.

In most of the meetings organized by Gora ever since his first "Atheist Conference" in 1941, most of the people attending had had little or no formal education, and there had been very little intellectual discussion apart from Gora answering questions. The conferences on partyless democracy had been more intellectual (mainly because the Marxists were articulate in their opposition to the idea), but still Gora himself was regarded less as an intellectual than as an activist. So in the Fall of 1968 he jumped at the opportunity to collaborate with some other intellectuals in putting on conferences, in two large towns (Bangalore and Tiruchi) in Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, on the theme of partyless democracy. About a hundred people

attended each of them—city folk with Western-type higher education (lawyers, professors etc.). They discussed elegant resolutions a far cry from the simple slogans, like "Grow vegetables instead of flowers" and "Let the ministers travel third-class," that Gora had so often used.

In January 1969 there was another upsurge of political violence in Telangana, this time for the sake of making Telangana a separate province of India (and thus no longer part of Andhra Pradesh). Gora organized and led in February a "peace march" in the most severely affected district. He persuaded the agitators to give up their violence and go in for public debate and lobbying. The result of the whole episode was that Telangana did not become a separate province[29] but the chief minister of Andhra Pradesh resigned and his replacement, a man from Telangana appointed by the Congress, saw to it that relatively more of the provincial government's expenditures were allocated to Telangana than before. This led in 1972 to agitation in some other parts of Andhra Pradesh to shed Telangana from the province. That later agitation became severe, disrupting communications and travel for about two weeks—which happened to be (see below) just when Gora's "First World Atheist Meet" was held at Vijayawada.

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29. See Note 14 (on page 39).

Chapter 9
Last Years

Lavanam spent the academic year 1966-67 in North America and, when he arrived back home, declared that the time was ripe for Gora to promote his ideas abroad; so Gora asked him to plan a tour. To broaden his scope accordingly, Gora began in January 1969 to publish an English-language monthly journal, "The Atheist." Gora edited it but Lavanam chose the title; I think "Positive Atheism" would have been a better choice to distinguish Gora's views from those not only of religious humanists but also of nasty atheists such as Ayn Rand.

In January 1970 Gora held a national atheist congress in Vijayawada, during which a letter arrived from the International Humanist and Ethical Union inviting him to address its next congress, to be held in Boston in August. He accepted the invitation, and it was arranged for him to circumnavigate the Earth in a tour lasting from July to November—a radiantly hopeful venture. He spent a month in eight countries of Western Europe, three months in the USA (where he visited 21 states), two weeks in Australia and New Zealand, and a few days in Indonesia, Singapore, Fiji and Sri Lanka. *The Atheist* published detailed reports. A few excerpts:

In Western Europe —

"The trains... are not at all crowded."

"[The British and the Dutch] had a series of cultural revolutions which have made them rational and realistic."

"The mason's hands were clean as he worked with the trowel. The sense of neatness... is part of the life of the European."

"During the question time [after a guest lecture at a German university] I had occasion to explain the meaning of decentralized administration, namely the *panchayat* system [of indigenous village government]: what it is and what it ought to be. The discussion revealed that the students favored Marxian solution[s] to the problems. They were inclined to the riots part of the class struggle."

"The [news]papers [in Sweden] published the news of the press conference [held by Gora] prominently in more than three columns."

"[In the slums of Rome] there are crowded houses and open drains; children play in the streets; mothers curse their children... [but inside the houses are remarkable amenities:] sofas, electric stoves, radios, and cutlery equal to that of the upper middle class in India."

"[My host in Paris was unable to speak English but, with gestures,] made me understand that he was strong because he ate beef and pork and that I was weak because I ate [only] vegetables just as sheep eat only grass.... But I retorted: bulls and elephants are strong, though vegetarians. At once he shook my hands."

"A band of progressive [English] Christians have sponsored... a fellowship of individuals working to translate the teachings of Christ into practical action in local, national and international affairs in social, political and economic spheres. It uses 'non-violent methods to achieve fundamental changes, at home and abroad, in the distribution of wealth, the exercise of power, and conditions of life.... It owes allegiance to no political party or religious denomination....' I consider

that this statement... is such that any progressive-minded person can subscribe to it ...replacing, if he desires, the name of Christ with the name of Buddha, Mohammed, Krishna, Shiva, Marx, Gandhi or any name of his admiration.... I signed the membership [form] as an atheist."

"The [airplane] stewardess... inquiringly uttered the two words, 'India? Gandhi?'."

In the USA —

"[At] the conference of the International Humanist and Ethical Union... I proposed that... we should cultivate the habit of talking to those with whom we differ. An understanding of the opposite point of view helps us to correct our own faults and to clear misunderstandings on the other side."

"Martin Luther King and Cesar Chavez are principal figures in putting Gandhian principles of non-violence into practice on a mass scale [in pressing for reforms]."

"I stayed [a week] in New York ...[to study] the problems of White-Black relations and of unwed mothers.... There has been a steady... increase in the illegitimacy rate over the past 25 years in the USA. The unmarried mother and her child are treated as second-class citizens...."

"The Republicans and Democrats have little difference as far as the interests of the common people go. The people have no pressing problems since all the unemployed, the old and the disabled enjoy the benefits of social security."

"I stayed... at the student commune of Stanford University... and participated in their routines.... I had shorter but similar experiences... in youth communes at Kingston, Kent, Berkeley and San Francisco."

"I went to Las Vegas at the invitation of two churches... [and] spoke from their pulpits on non-violence and atheism.... My host took me... into a gambling house.... Prayer and gambling reflect the same aspect of human nature which covets big results for small efforts."

"At Palm Springs... my host was the bishop of the local church where I spoke on the humanist approach to the problems of life."

In Australia —

"I was impressed with the open-mindedness of the churchmen. They were concerned more with the Christian way of life than with the Christian faith.... If other religions too changed their emphasis likewise they would find a great similarity between their ethical concepts. There would be no more Hindu-Muslim riots in India or Catholic-Protestant conflicts in Ireland."

Apart from all these interactions with progressive Christians, another result of the tour was a plan to hold in Vijayawada in December 1971 a "World Atheist Meet" presided over by Madalyn Murray O'Hair, whom Gora had met in the USA. She was a famous atheist activist whose rather poor character[30] he had not perceived. Three things, however, interfered with the planned congress. (*1*) Mrs. O'Hair couldn't attend, for lack of a passport. (She sent Gora a telegram asking him to sort out the problem. He made the 3500-kilometer round trip to New Delhi to look into it, and found that it was due to her insistence on getting, like the Roman Catholic pope, a diplomatic passport because she claimed to be "the pope of atheism.") (*2*) The congress had to be postponed for a year because of logistical uncertainties due to the Bangladesh War of 1971. (*3*) When it did take place (in 1972), the logistical side-effects of severe political agitation in Andhra Pradesh just at that time—the agitation to dump Telangana from the province—prevented most of the foreign delegates from arriving on time.

Gora meanwhile published (in 1972) an up-to-date, book-length account in English of his philosophy of positive atheism (see

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30. See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Madalyn_Murray_O'Hair.

Appendix)—and also pursued a novel ecumenical idea derived from an experience he had had while doing volunteer work as a Congress "organizer" in Delhi 25 years earlier. An eminent Muslim politician had invited him and Saraswathi to dinner, and had served beef. Though customarily vegetarian they had eaten the beef as a gesture of cordiality and open-mindedness—and then Gora had asked the host whether he would partake of pork if it were offered to him as a guest in the home of someone whose religion permitted it, and the host had said he would. Gora's idea now in 1972 was to hold a public "Beef and Pork Friendship Dinner" at the Atheist Center by way of celebrating the 25th anniversary of India's independence from British rule. With massive police protection, some 135 people marched past a crowd of violence-minded protesters (whose religious leaders had told them that the atheists were planning to stage a public slaughter of a cow and a pig), ate a mixture of little cubes of beef and pork from two tins of canned meat which Gora had bought in Madras, and signed a register to show that they had done this radically open-minded thing.

In 1973 he decided to found a "College for Social Change" to train social activists. He was hoping to spend half his time teaching there, once the school had government certification and could be started.

In 1974 he made another international tour, this time including Moscow and Egypt for five days each, as well as two months in Western Europe. In Scandinavia he studied in some detail the adult-education programs. In Egypt he was mainly a tourist. In London he had an experience echoing the one he had devised, with his "beef and pork friendship dinner," for Hindus and Muslims in India:

> "In Europe, alcoholic drinks are taken along with food... [but] I was taking only water or some fruit juice.... At last... I felt I should... not allow an inhibition [due merely to tradition] to govern my conduct... so I asked for a spoonful of [the] champagne, which [my hosts] were drinking.... To me it was a momentous event when

> I changed a value system and thereby grew more rational and sociable."

In Moscow, where he was a guest of the appropriate official organizations, he had a translator/guide and a carefully planned agenda of tourist sights and meetings with the heads of organizations, two of which were chosen because they would be of special interest to him as a professed atheist:

> "It is one thing to do something and quite another to understand and do it.... 'Znaniye' is the institution devoted to educating people in the scientific way of understanding. It has a ramification of institutions... throughout the USSR for spreading scientific knowledge through exhibitions, talks, study camps and literature. They freely use the word 'atheism' for the purpose....
>
> "The Council of Religious Affairs is the complement of Znaniye. Article 124 of the Constitution of the USSR ensures to citizens 'freedom of religious worship and freedom of anti-religious propaganda.' While Znaniye takes up anti-religious propaganda, the Council of Religious Affairs helps those who desire religious worship.... Christians of all denominations..., Muslims and Jews... hold their conferences, maintain their respective places of worship and publish in Russian and regional languages religious literature like the Bible and Quran.... The Council of Religious Affairs assists only in the organization of religious matters but does not subsidize them with grants and funds from the government. Devotees have to maintain their institution. No funds are allowed from outside."

The chronic problem in India (under British imperial rule) of destitution due to unemployment and underemployment prompted him to say, in regard to the USSR:

> "Creating employment for all able-bodied adults is the speciality of the socialistic way of life. [The USSR has]... achieved it through regimentation. If it can be done in another way also, it should be done and shown."

Soon after returning to India he toured (in 1974-75) several provinces—Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra etc.—giving talks in support of the anti-corruption and social-reform aspects of JP's "total revolution." What he now saw suggested to him, however, that the JP movement was, notwithstanding its idealism, just as superficial and Romantic as the hippie movement in the USA, and that instead of seeking some kind of "quick fix" for India's problems he ought to focus on educating the next generation.

Early in July 1975 two eminent Gandhians from Sevagram went to Delhi to tell Indira how much they disapproved of her Emergency Rule. She suggested to them that Gora might serve as a go-between in negotiating a settlement with JP.[31] They went to Vijayawada in mid-July to put the idea to Gora; he liked it, but wanted to know more as to what she had in mind. While awaiting a response from her, on July 26th at a public gathering in Vijayawada he began to give a talk on rural development, when in the middle of a sentence—"In Gandhi's ashram we used to carry the night-soil in two buckets, like this..."—he held out his two hands as if carrying a pail with each one, and thereupon collapsed and died immediately.[32]

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31. JP's choice for an intermediary was another friend of his, Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah of Kashmir, but Indira or someone acting in her behalf prohibited JP's letter to Sheikh Abdullah from being delivered.
32. A few days before, a government certification committee had visited the Atheist Center and said that it would sanction the establishment of his "College for Social Change." After his death the project was abandoned. This book will not, however, describe the history of the Atheist Center in the last quarter of the 20th century.

Chapter 10
Reflections

The fact that Gora was a good man and an atheist is not the most remarkable thing about him. There have been many good people among the atheists as well as among the Hindus, Buddhists, Confucians, Jews, Christians, Muslims, etc. That he was an atheist Gandhian has more to do with what I think was his rare significance (making it worthwhile to write this book). In order to explain what that is, I should first review some aspects of his "positive atheism" and describe an important aspect of Gandhi's concept of civilization.

Gora took the term "atheism" from the Encyclopedia Britannica. I consider it an inexact term for his outlook, because its normal meaning covers only one, not especially important part of his disbelief. An atheist is, I think, normally taken to be someone who rejects the concept of one or more "divine" beings—one or more immortal beings with will-power. Gora when writing in his native Telugu would most often use, however, not the word *nirishwar*, which means the negation of belief in a single divine being presiding over the universe, but a Telugu word,

nastikatwamu,[33] based on the Sanskrit *nastika*, which normally meant the rejection of the Vedic tradition and referred thus to a variety of alternative Indian philosophical traditions, Buddhist as well as materialist and Jain, not all of which were atheist according to the definition that I have offered. To dislodge belief in a supreme deity was, in Gora's social work, less crucial than to dislodge the traditional Hindu belief in karma and transmigration, according to which the circumstances of your birth, whether you are stricken by diseases and/or natural disasters, etc.—all those things have been predetermined by your own deeds in some previous life if not in this one. Such was the belief against which he had to struggle in the hearts of most of the other people with whom he dealt: the belief, shared alike by low- as well as high-caste people, that the low-caste ones ought to be poor, illiterate, disdained etc.

And meanwhile Gora defined theism (*aastikatwamu*)[33] in quite a different way than I just did implicitly by saying that a "divine" being is "an immortal being with will-power." On the first page of the first edition of his book on atheism published in 1941, *Nastikatwamu (leka devudu ledu*) (meaning: "Atheism: there is no god"), Gora equated theism with "believing that the universe and human life along with it are both governed by *something transcendent*" [my italics]; and thus he would say (in the preface to the third edition) that under theism, "man has become impotent and has submitted himself to the hardship and cruelty of economic dominance and racial arrogance, saying 'This is my karma'"—even though the traditional concepts of karma (in the sense of "fate" due to past deeds) and *kudarata* (in the sense of "poetic justice" meted out by Nature) were of an impersonal force and not of an immortal being with will-power.[34]

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33. The suffix in this Telugu word means "-ism."
34. There is sometimes the same kind of defect in English translations of statements made by Gandhi in his native Gujarati—as when *kudarata* was translated as "God" in the following statement of 1932: "God

Most of the superstitious and downtrodden people in India lived, then as now, in villages. But Gandhi's concept of civilization was that its economic foundation is agriculture (as distinct from hunting and gathering) and that it is therefore based mainly on rural rather than on urban (or nomadic) culture. And yet, among the relatively few people who collaborated personally with Gandhi and knew about and promulgated—or at least praised—the modern Western science of that day, very few paid more attention to the villages than to the cities. If you were "modern" by Western standards, then you probably focused more on the cities than on the villages even though you were collaborating with Gandhi whose focus was the other way around. And, among the few "moderns" (by Western standards) who collaborated personally with Gandhi but had no tendency to dismiss the villages as hinterlands to where the important things were happening, Gora was the only one who, in addition to having been trained in a Western scientific discipline (he never called himself a "scientist" the way pseudo-scientists do; he called himself a botanist, i.e. using the specific name of his scientific discipline), walked like Gandhi from village to village teaching peasants certain things which he thought it was important for them to learn. Neither Gandhi nor Gora wanted India to modernize according to the Western historical scenario of ignorant peasants migrating to city slums and joining the *Lumpenproletariat* until such time as a factory or the like might hire them and then perhaps their children or grandchildren

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never creates more than what is strictly needed for the moment, with the result that if anyone appropriates more than he really needs, he reduces his neighbor to destitution." (Gandhi, *Satyagrahashrama Itihasa* (Ahmedabad), p. 49, and *Collected Works* (1972 edition), vol. 50 p. 215. I should perhaps mention that Gandhi in 1947, influenced certainly by Kumarappa and probably by Gora too, modified this idea and put it in strictly secular ecological terms rather than religiously derived puritanical terms: "Earth [*prithvi*] provides enough to satisfy every man's need but not for every man's greed." See Y. P. Anand and Mark Lindley, "Gandhi on Providence and Greed," in *Mainstream*, vol. 40, no. 15 (New Delhi, 2007).

might one day go to school. Instead, they wanted India's recovery from the desolation wrought by British economic exploitation to take place directly in the villages.

Since the point of departure for this book has been the fact that Gandhi regarded Gora's thought and practice as being superior to his own, some further comparisons may be helpful in drawing a profile of Gora's significance. There was a considerable overlap between what they taught in the villages: hygiene[35] and self-reliance and non-violence and doing away with Untouchability. But Gora taught also a comprehensive set of primary- and secondary-school-type subjects which Gandhi did not teach in his public discourses. And Gandhi taught some things which Gora did not; worship of Rama is an example that comes immediately to mind, since the Hindu fundamentalists have made great use of that cult to stir up violence against Muslims. But there was no bigotry in Gandhi's devotion, ever since childhood, to Rama. In the following remarks of 1933 he drew implicitly upon the fact that in India it has long been normal for parents, after inculcating their religion in their children (as most parents do all over the world), to choose their children's spouses:

> "Just as a husband does not remain faithful to his wife, or wife to her husband, because either is conscious of some exclusive superiority of the other over the rest of his or her sex, but because of some indefinable but irresistible attraction, so does one remain irresistibly faithful to one's religion and find full satisfaction in such adhesion. And just as a faithful husband does not need, in order to sustain his faithfulness, to consider other women as inferior to his wife, so does not a person belonging to one religion need to consider other religions as inferior to his own."

And, Gandhi's devotion to Rama differed not only from the Christian devotion to Jesus as the only possible savior but also—for another reason—from Gora's devotion to atheism. Gandhi told a correspondent (in 1928):

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35. See Note 4 (on page 14).

"You have used the word 'viewpoint' as synonymous with 'religion.' I do not. Whilst I would not press my religion upon others, I would press my viewpoint upon others, as every one of us must. Religion is a matter of feeling or the heart and, therefore, not a matter for argument, and I would hold everybody's feeling as dear as my own, because I expect him to do so with reference to my feeling."

I should mention also that whereas Gandhi attributed no value to sexual pleasure *per se*, Gora took it to be a good thing when enjoyed in a socially responsible way; that Gora was dissatisfied with Gandhi's reliance on the concept of voluntary "trusteeship" whereby the rich would, of their own accord with no prodding from others, manage their property exclusively for the benefit of society whilst reducing drastically their own material standard of living and doing physical "bread labor" every day; and yet that Gora like Gandhi rejected Marxism-Leninism as entailing violence and immoral secrecy; they alike rejected the Marxist idea that reform is bad because it postpones the Revolution.

I could say more about the similarities and differences between them—and not least about the fact that Gandhi's political achievement was vastly greater (partly because his religiosity resonated with that of the people of India); but let me turn instead to the fact that Gora upheld his unorthodox views in a remarkably friendly way. An Englishwoman—the daughter of a Church-of-England bishop—who had visited the Atheist Center for six months in 1969-70 recalled in 1996:

"Gora never lost an opportunity, in conversation, of referring to his ideals. He was lively and determined and enjoyed a good argument, which he would never 'lose', though always respecting others even when he disagreed with them. For evening discussions he would walk up and down.... He would often smile and laugh, and could be fond of teasing, while never losing the seriousness of his philosophy. He was widely read, and able to quote pertinently for any situation.... His personality was dynamic, determined, patient, tolerant and full of humor. I never heard him criticize, though he was

firm in expressing his disagreements. I have a lasting memory of him in his hut, his palm-leaf-roofed office, sitting cross-legged on the floor, reading, typing on what now would seem a very outdated portable manual typewriter, receiving visitors, who would sit with him; allowing conversation, reading and writing to complement each other....

"He was fond of quoting his conversations with Gandhi....

"He acknowledged unmarried mothers and worked hard to achieve their acceptance in society, himself welcoming and supporting them.

"Firm in his ideas, he was modest in his person, and always willing to listen to others. While Carl Rogers was theorizing in the United States about 'unconditional positive regard', Gora was exhibiting this attribute, accepting and valuing everyone whom he met.

"With Gora I attended a public meeting where a well-known local swami was also on the platform. The contrast between this man's encouragement of adulation from the crowd, and Gora's determined expression of his ideas with personal modesty, impressed me greatly. The crowd, excited by the atmosphere and encouraged by his ideas, would have taken a worshipful attitude towards him, but Gora gently discouraged it.

"In valuing all humans equally, Gora had particular messages for women. When I arrived, proudly wearing silver bangles which had been given to me as a birthday present, he asked why I should need to wear such baubles and explained that all the women in his family did not wear jewelry as it was a sign of [women's] subjugation. Traditionally women [in India] would wear jewelry as a sign of their husband's status or as a dowry for their husband's family....

"Determined but modest, firm but kind, earnest but humorous, Gora was a man of contrasts and integrity."[36]

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36. In a lecture delivered in 2007, a Gandhian academic, Prof. Neelakanta Radhakrishnan, described likewise Gora's "rare charm and authenticity," and recalled that "He... stood head and shoulders above his contemporaries, though very often his presence among them gave the impression that he was 'an odd man out'."

It seems to me notable also that Gora's "positive atheism" went far beyond rejecting all the superstitious aspects of religion. He and Saraswathi, even though they had children of their own to bring up, embraced "propertylessness" in 1940 in order to dedicate themselves to broader humanitarian service. This was, of course, one of the main reasons why Gandhi admired him in spite of their differences. I find it perfectly sensible of Gandhi to have admired (or not admired) people for reasons of that kind rather than for their explicit philosophical views. But at the same time I admire Gora's philosophical enterprise. How often is theism nowadays as truthful as his atheism was?

Vinoba's opinion that Gora was comparable in greatness to Sankara is cited on page 74. Other tributes to Gora have included the following remarks:

- "What he may have sacrificed in worldly honor and comfort, he gained immeasurably in the respect accorded to him by innumerable people whose lives he enriched.... When justice needed a friend, Gora could be counted on." (Charles Walker, an American Quaker)
- "We British count ourselves as pragmatists but Gora's simple down-to-earth practicality was something we have lost sight of.... [B]y the saintliness (if a secular humanist may use the word) of his example, [he] kept his ideals intact." (Christopher Macy, editor of the British journal, *Psychology Today*).
- "Gora was the embodiment of Gandhiji's ideals of austere life, moral behavior, urge for social change, practical idealism and fearless action.... He was like a saint." (J. Vengala Rao, Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh)
- "During his visit to the Soviet Union we were greatly impressed by his personality, his power of conviction, sincerity and transparent honesty." (Two Soviet-Russian officials, A. Ledovsky and Irina K. Yershova)
- "He was one of those rare people who practiced what they preached." (Indira Gandhi)

Appendix: Gora on Atheism and Free Will

by James Farmelant

In this account of certain aspects of Gora's philosophical writings on atheism, I will emphasize his concept of free will, because it played a central role in his philosophy of atheism[37] and it helped tie together his thinking as a philosopher with his practical work as a social worker and activist. Although Gora was not a Marxist, in effect he agreed with Marx that "The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it."[38]

Please note that my approach will be that of a Westerner with a background in Western philosophy; I can claim no expertise in Indian philosophy. While I recognize that Gora by background and education had roots in both Indian and Western thought, my discussion will tend to emphasize some affinities of his thought with certain important movements and tendencies in 20th-century

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37. This is acknowledged implicitly in the title, "Gora's Positive Atheism and Free Will," of a book by G. V. K. Aassaan (Poongunran Publishing House, 1990).
38. Karl Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach," in L. D. Easton and K. H. Guddat, ed., *Writings of the Young Marx on Philosophy and Society* (Garden City: Doubleday and Co., Anchor Books, 1967).

Western philosophy[39]. In some instances there is little doubt, I think, that he was familiar with the writings of some of the Western philosophers whose thinking was similar to his own. In other instances, it seems that he arrived at his positions independently of his Western contemporaries.

In reviewing Gora as a writer on philosophical topics, one of the first things I have noticed is that he tended to use certain philosophical terms in what might seem to a Western reader to be rather idiosyncratic ways. (I do not mean this as a criticism—many philosophers put new meanings on old words—but merely as a warning to the reader.) Some of this was simply reflective of his Indian background, but some of his usages were indeed idiosyncratic. For instance, he used the term "atheism" to mean much more than a disbelief in the existence of one or more divine beings. This usage reflects his Indian intellectual background; in fact, it turns out that he used the word "atheist" as a translation of the Sanskrit term *nastika*. The Sanskrit term when used by Indian philosophers and historians of philosophy covers various schools of thought that rejected the authority of the Vedas. Buddhism, Jainism and Charvaka have all been labeled as *nastik* schools.[40] More colloquially, however, the same Indian term has been used also to denote atheists.[41] So when Gora described himself as an atheist, he on the one hand meant

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39. See http://www.buddhiwadi.org/rationalism.htm (accessed 7 July 2007) for an account placing Gora in relation to some other 20th-century Indian atheists: Ravendra Nath (in collaboration with Kawaljeet Kaur), "Rationalism, Humanism and Atheism," in *Twentieth Century Indian Thought.*
40. Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya, ed,. *Carvaka/Lokayata: An Anthology of Source Materials and Some Recent Studies* (Indian Council of Philosophical Research, 1990).
41. K. B. Krishna, *Studies in Hindu Materialism* (Milinda Publications, 1994).

something similar to what Westerners would mean by that term, inasmuch as he certainly denied the existence of gods, but his usage embraced also the broader connotations of the term *nastika*: he stood against the authority of the Vedas and of the social institutions and customs associated with them, including especially the caste system and the belief in the law of inherited karma.

Gora's approach to the philosophy of religion was distinctly verificationist. He regarded theological language as meaningless because it is not verifiable inasmuch as it doesn't express testable propositions about the world. This position is similar to that taken by the logical positivists (such as Carnap[42] and Ayer[43]) as well as by Antony Flew in his famous essay, "Theology and Falsification,"[44] in which it is argued that religious language is lacking in cognitive meaning because it is not falsifiable. (Similar positions have been taken by more recent philosophers such as Kai Nielsen[45] and Michael Martin.[46]) But while Gora's position thus seems similar to that taken by the logical positivists, I do not see any indication that he had read their work at the time that he wrote *Atheism: There is No God* or even later. One indication of this is that he blamed logic for promoting false ideas like theism. The logical positivists would not blame logic for promoting theology and metaphysics; instead they would blame distorted philosophical

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42. Rudolf Carnap, *The Logical Structure of the World and "Pseudoproblems" in Philosophy* (Open Court, 2003).
43. A. J. Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic* (Penguin, 1978).
44. See Alisdair Macintyre and Antony Flew, ed., *New Essays in Philosophical Theology* (SCM Press, 1963).
45. Kai Nielsen, "Does God Exist? Reflections on Disbelief," in *Free Inquiry* 1 (Spring, 1981).
46. Michael Martin, *Atheism: A Philosophical Justification* (Temple University Press, 1992).

interpretations of logic—interpretations which had, in their opinion, been dispelled by the work of modern logicians such as Frege,[47] Russell[48] and Wittgenstein.[49]

Gora had an interesting take on causality. He had rejected what he called universal causality because he objected to the idea of a first cause and because he upheld free will (which he saw as being incompatible with determinism). In regard to the first issue, both Hume and Kant had rejected the idea that we could legitimately and meaningfully speak of a cause for the universe as a whole. In this regard Gora was in agreement with them in rejecting the cosmological argument for the existence of God. Yet I do not think that either Hume or Kant saw this as weakening or undermining the principle of causality as such. Causality for both of those Western thinkers was a principle that operated only within the realm of experience and so could not be expected to apply to an "extra-empirical" realm such as Kant (though not Hume) thought exists.

Gora also saw causality as being limited by the existence of free will. He argued that we know of the existence of free will on the basis of experience, including especially our own experiences of making choices; and, he regarded free will as inconsistent with causality: he even held that "A person forms certain desires without any cause."[50] He made little attempt to explain how this could be possible. Instead, he said that "[M]an is not merely his physical body, but he is a free individuality with consciousness,"[51] and then

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47. Gottlob Frege, *Collected Papers on Mathematics, Logic, and Philosophy* (Basil Blackwell, 1984).
48. Bertrand Russell, "On Denoting," in *Mind*, New Series, Vol. 14, No. 56 (Oct., 1905), pp. 479-493.
49. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, translated by D.F. Pears and B.F. McGuinness (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961).
50. Gora, *Atheism: There is No God* (Atheist Center, 2007), p. 128.
51. *Loc. cit.*

went on to deny the theistic position that this is to be explained by man having a "soul."

In my opinion, however, the theistic position makes more sense than does Gora's position on free will. If humans are indeed gifted with the ability to break or transcend the laws of natural phenomena as described by science, then that is something which requires a special explanation. So, I detect an inconsistency in Gora's philosophical thinking. He was committed to a generally naturalistic outlook, but in regard to human beings he made exceptions that are not very different from the ones that theists and other supernaturalists make. In fact, he seems to me to have been a supernaturalist when it came to human free will!

But of course that was not his intention. I suppose that by accepting the concept of "free individuality with consciousness" whilst dismissing what he regarded as the "theistic" concept of soul, he meant to reject any conceivable attribute—such as transmigration or eternal salvation/damnation—of the human mind or soul (call it what you will) that he would regard as supernatural, whilst allowing for contra-causal free will by retaining, in his concept of individuality with consciousness, something which I regard as supernatural since it seems to me that there is no natural explanation of how an individual forms desires without any cause.

Gora introduced into his discussion of free will some "idiosyncratic" terms when he wrote (already in 1938 and still in 1970) about what he called "materialist theists" and "materialistic theism" and described materialism as a "godless theism."[52] It turns out that "materialist theists" are not people who believe in the existence of the gods but are simply materialists (whom everyone else would describe as atheists) who espouse determinism.

Gora was—correctly, in my opinion—critical of the Marxist

52. *Ibid.*, pp. 19-20.

concept of dialectical materialism, which he saw as theistic because "it requires man's surrender to natural laws or to historical forces.[53] In this and in some other ways, his critique of Marxism resembles those that were published in the late 1930s and 1940s by certain Westerners. His rejection of dialectical materialism for being "theistic" is not unlike critiques written by Lucio Colletti and Sidney Hook[54] and by Karl Popper in his famous rejection of Marx's own "historicism."[55]

While I would agree as to the demerits of dialectical materialism,[56] I would note also that Gora was apparently unfamiliar (at least back in 1938-40) with the positions of Western "compatibilist" philosophers who have maintained that determinism can be reconciled with our experiences of freedom and moral responsibility. I will return later to this point; but for now let me just mention that to insist, as Gora did, that atheism requires belief in contra-causal free will would have seemed strange to philosophers like Bertrand Russell, W. V. Quine, Ted Honderich, and Patricia and Paul Churchland, all of whom have rejected belief in the existence of the gods as well as in uncaused desires. For Gora, not only the Marxists but also these other writers might appear to have been theists (in his sense of the term) without their knowing it.

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53. Gora, *Positive Atheism* (Atheist Center, 1978), p. 4.
54. Lucio Colletti, *Ideologia e società* (1969), translated by John Merrington and Judith White as *From Rousseau to Lenin; Studies in Ideology and Society* (Monthly Review Press, 1975). Sidney Hook, *Reason, Social Myths, and Democracy* (1940, republished by Prometheus Books in 1991).
55. Karl Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (London, 1945 and later editions; written mostly between 1938 and 1943, however).
56. Some of the strongest critics of dialectical materialism are Marxists (as indeed were both Colletti and Hook when they became critics of the concept).

I should mention also that Gora did not echo Kant's defense of free will (which has been very influential in Western thought). Kant held that free will exists in what he called the "noumenal" realm, the realm of things-in-themselves, which is unknowable to us, rather than in the phenomenal realm; whereas Gora held that the existence of free will is confirmed by experience.

The fact that a concept of free will was central to Gora's brand of atheism thus raises the question of where he derived his concept of free will. In this light it is interesting that he had been on close terms with the eminent Indian philosopher, educator and statesman, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan. Radhakrishnan helped Gora following his dismissal from P. R. College in Kakinada, helping to secure for him a post as lecturer at Hindu College in Masulipatnam. It has been reported that during this period Gora had conversations with Radhakrishnan.[57] He may also have read Radhakrishnan's important and famous book—*The Hindu View of Life*—of lectures delivered at Oxford in 1926. In the course of that book, Radhakrishnan placed considerable emphasis on the notion of free will and attempted to reconcile it with the law of karma by arguing along the following lines:

> "The cards in the game of life are given to promote our ideals. We do not select them. They are traced to our past Karma, but we can call as we please, lead what suit we will, and as we play, we gain or lose. And there is freedom."[58]

It seems to me quite likely (though one cannot be absolutely certain of it) that Gora would have been familiar with this aspect of Radhakrishnan's philosophical thinking and would have found it useful.

I should point out also, however, that Gora's position concerning the nature of human consciousness bears striking similarities with the positions taken by certain Western philosophers in the

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57. Lavanam, personal communication, 2007.
58. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, *The Hindu View of Life* (London, G. Allen & Unwin, 1927), p. 54.

phenomenological and existentialist traditions. One thinks of Husserl, Heidegger and—most saliently—Jean-Paul Sartre.

For Sartre as well as for Gora, one objection to theism was that the existence of a divine creator would preclude human free will. In a lecture entitled "Existentialism is a Humanism,"[59] Sartre argued that if God existed and created man, then man's nature would be predetermined by God and hence human free will would be an illusion, but since man is free, therefore God cannot exist.

Sartre in opposing determinism argued that to accept deterministic views of man constituted a kind of "bad faith." For Sartre, a basic tenet (which he approved of) of phenomenology was that pre-reflective experience is primary, while experience when harnessed by concepts and categories is inevitably derivative and distorted. Gora seems to have taken a similar position when he argued that we should privilege experience over logic.

For Sartre as well as for Gora, social and political issues helped to motivate a concern with free will. In "Existentialism is a Humanism,"Sartre discussed freedom of choice and the responsibility associated with it and the anguish that can sometimes be entailed by the exercise of freedom. In the discussion, he cited, as one of his examples, the choice that confronted Frenchmen during

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59. Jean-Paul Sartre, "Existentialism Is a Humanism," in Walter Kaufman, ed., *Existentialism from Dostoyevsky to Sartre* (Meridian Publishing Co., 1989). Existentialism is a philosophical movement which became prominent in the 20th century and which holds that individual human beings have full responsibility for creating the meanings of their own lives. (Some existentialists say that an individual who has not yet created such meaning merely "exists" without yet really "being" anything.) Existentialism can be either atheistic, as in the case of Sartre and of Albert Camus, or religious as in the case of Karl Jaspers and of Martin Buber. One could describe Gora as a thoroughly atheistic existentialist since he saw a taint of theism in any concept of ultimate constraint (whether by a god or by determinism) on individual self-determination.

World War II as to whether to join the Resistance or to collaborate with the German occupiers of France. For Sartre this represented the kind of stark choice that on occasion underlies political action. He apparently believed that people would be relatively unlikely to make what he would regard as good political choices if they were unaware of their own freedom of choice and its associated responsibility.

Gora's eldest son has recalled his father having occasionally mentioned Sartre (though without recalling what he said about him).[60] And, Gora discussed existentialist philosophy, albeit briefly, in *Positive Atheism*.[61] He praised it, saying:

> "Existentialist philosophy recognizes the existence of the individual as the real purpose of human life. The recognition is basically atheistic and it encourages the individual to free himself from the impositions of custom, governmental authority, economic pressures and cultural inhibitions."

But he also found existentialism lacking in certain ways. He believed that it tended to overemphasize individual liberty at the expense of an appreciation of the individual's social and community responsibilities. He regarded Western hippies, who seemed to him somewhat parasitical (when he toured the USA in 1971), as exemplifying this less positive side of existentialism.

Let me turn now, however, to a brief account of Western philosophical "compatibilism" *vis-à-vis* Gora's concept of free will. (The classic compatibilists have included Hobbes, Hume, Moritz Schlick and A. J. Ayer.[62])

60. See Note 57.
61. Gora, *Positive Atheism*, pp. 42-45.
62. Robert Kane, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Free Will* (Oxford University Press, 2002) is a standard reference work on the free will/determinism problem as it is debated by contemporary philosophers. An older but still useful survey collection is Sidney Hook, ed., *Determinism and Freedom in the Age of Modern Science* (Collier, 1961).

Compatibilists deny the existence of contra-causal free will while contending that what people most highly value when they assert they possess free will is in fact compatible with determinism. For the compatibilist, free will is not the ability to make choices as an agent independent of prior causes, but rather that as an agent one is not forced to make a certain choice. In other words, freedom is basically equated with lack of coercion; free acts are not uncaused, but also are not due to coercion. And, according to the compatibilists, whenever our choices are not coerced, then our notions concerning moral responsibility are compatible with determinism.

Opposing that view, the incompatibilists argue that determinism is not compatible with free will. The incompatibilists fall into two camps: (*1*) those who (like Gora) believe in the existence of contra-causal free will which they see as being inconsistent with determinism, and (*2*) "hard determinists" who accept determinism and see it as being incompatible with free will.

British philosopher Ted Honderich is sometimes described as being a hard determinist, but his position is to some extent beyond the traditional labels. He maintains that when people discuss and think about freedom, they in fact have two different notions of freedom, which they often fail to distinguish from one another. There is what Honderich calls "freedom as voluntariness," which is freedom as lack of coercion; he readily grants that this kind of freedom is compatible with determinism. But then there is also the concept that he calls "freedom as origination," which is the notion of freedom as involving some sort of self-causation.[63] This latter kind is akin to what Gora was talking about when he said that people

63. Ted Honderich, *How Free Are You? The Determinism Problem* (Oxford University Press, 1993; revised 2nd ed., 2002). A critic of Honderich, Colin McGinn, is of the opinion that even though the philosophical problem might be solved in a fairly simple way if we were capable of understanding it aright, the fact that nobody has managed to solve it shows that there are inherent limitations in the human brain which prevent us from finding the solution. If Gora were around today, he might perhaps subscribe to McGinn's "mysterian"

can have uncaused desires; and it contradicts determinism. Honderich maintains that the failure to distinguish between the two kinds of freedom is behind much of the perplexities surrounding the free-will-*vs*-determinism debates. He accepts freedom as voluntariness while rejecting freedom as origination. He maintains that both classic compatibilism and classic incompatibilism are flawed positions because the proponents of both positions have failed to take into account the existence of these two distinct notions of freedom.

Owen Flanagan in another recent philosophical book calls himself a "neo-compatibilist." His position appears to me quite similar to that of Honderich.[64]

If philosophers like Honderich and Flanagan are correct, then it would seem that one does not have to reject determinism in order to uphold the values of liberty and personal autonomy. Having expressed this hope, however, I ought to acknowledge that Honderich in the second edition of his book suggests that the readjustments entailed by wholeheartedly accepting determinism—adjustments which include the abandonment of beliefs and practices associated with "freedom as origination"—require a far more radical rethinking of certain philosophical views, especially those concerning the nature of consciousness, than he had previously believed were needed. In other words: the philosophical problem is not yet really solved.

Gora was a staunch advocate of free will because he saw this idea as essential for opposing the fatalism associated with traditional Hindu belief in inherited karma which conditioned the Indian masses into accepting the caste system with all of its oppressiveness. I am

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view and thus, while conceding that he, Gora, doesn't pretend to understand how free will as we experience it can be reconciled with the claims (to which he subscribes) of scientific determinism, neither can anyone else solve the conundrum. This is one way to interpret in modern terms his assertion that experience, by proving the existence of free will, overrides certain claims of logic.

64. Owen Flanagan, *The Problem of the Soul* (Basic Books, 2002).

a determinist but I gladly acknowledge that Gora's advocacy of free will played a progressive role in helping break down the conditioning that had inured the Indian masses into accepting social oppression based on caste distinctions and fatalism.

As redoubtable a determinist as the behavioral psychologist B. F. Skinner recognized that the concepts of freedom and dignity have often played a progressive role by weakening social controls based on coercion and punishment; he held that:

> "The literature of freedom... has been successful in reducing the aversive stimuli used in intentional control, but it has made the mistake of defining freedom in terms of states of mind or feelings, and it has therefore not been able to deal effectively with techniques of control which do not breed escape or revolt but nevertheless have aversive consequences."[65]

According to Skinner, the acceptance of belief in human freedoms of will can impede cultural progress, on the one hand by directing attention to mythological sources of human problems instead of to the real causes, and on the other hand by devaluing the potency of positive reinforcement to promote socially desirable behavior.

According to Honderich, a confused notion of free will can carry pernicious side-effects such as the justification of retributive punishment—including capital punishment—and the justification or rationalization of extreme economic and social inequalities. If human beings are indeed endowed with contra-causal free will, then each one is in large degree the master of his or her own fate and so must bear ultimate responsibility for his or her actions and their consequences; it is thus "only fair" that criminals be punished for their crimes regardless of whether such punishment can be shown to help prevent future crimes; and, extreme economic inequality is

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65. B. F. Skinner, *Beyond Freedom and Dignity* (Alfred A. Knopf, 1971), pp. 42-43.

fair since success and failure in life are the just deserts for the differential exercise of free will: those who exercise it wisely are justly entitled to the benefits thereof, while those who exercise it foolishly are justly penalized in the market economy.

A concept of free will is implicit also in the following reply of an Indian temple trustee to a question put to him by Mahatma Gandhi in 1925:

> *Gandhi:* "Is it fair to exclude a whole section of Hindus, because of their supposed lower birth, from public roads which can be used by non-Hindus, by criminals and bad characters, and even by dogs and cattle?"
>
> *Temple trustee:* "But how can it be helped? They are reaping the reward of their karma."[66]

Gora condoned neither capital punishment[67] nor hundred-fold economic inequality nor Untouchability. I have suggested that his embracing of contra-causal free will was inconsistent with his generally naturalistic outlook; I would now further suggest that his treatises on atheism would be more satisfying to a modern Western reader who sympathizes with his egalitarianism if they took account of the fact that a moral justification for extreme social or economic inequalities can be derived from a belief in contra-causal free will. Yet I do feel that this problematic aspect of his philosophy should be considered in the light of the following facts: (*1*) His first treatise on atheism was not written for modern Western readers, and the views which he set out there influenced his later writings as well. (*2*) All his writings were essays in understanding the world *for the purpose of changing it*—partly, in fact, by making human society

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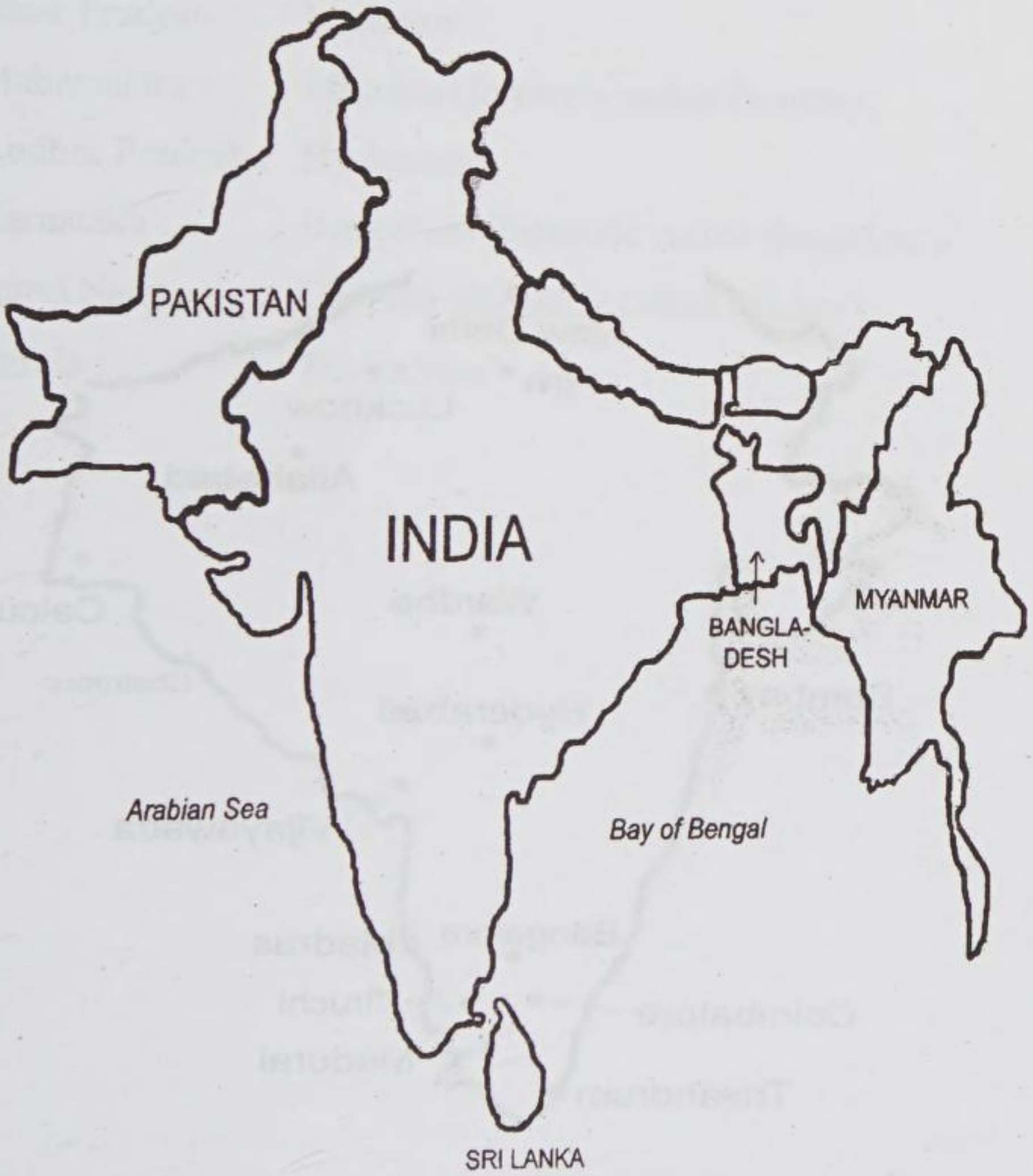
66. Cited from Eleanor Zelliot, "Gandhi and Ambedkar: A Study in Leadership," in J. Michael Maher, ed., *The Untouchables in Contemporary India* (Tucson, University of Arizona Press, 1972), p. 79.
67. See Note 57 (on page 103).

more egalitarian. (*3*) He demonstrated that what some philosophers would regard as a theoretically incorrect notion of free will can be used to battle social oppression, and in fact his promotion of belief in human agency helped many people break free from the oppressive fatalism associated with the traditional caste system and the Hindu belief in inherited karma. And, (*4*), even though the compatibilists and neo-compatibilists believe that determinism can be reconciled with our experiences of freedom and moral responsibility, some of the most astute recent philosophers admit that the task has not been completed; so, the issue is not yet settled.

Maps

1. Five South-Asian countries:



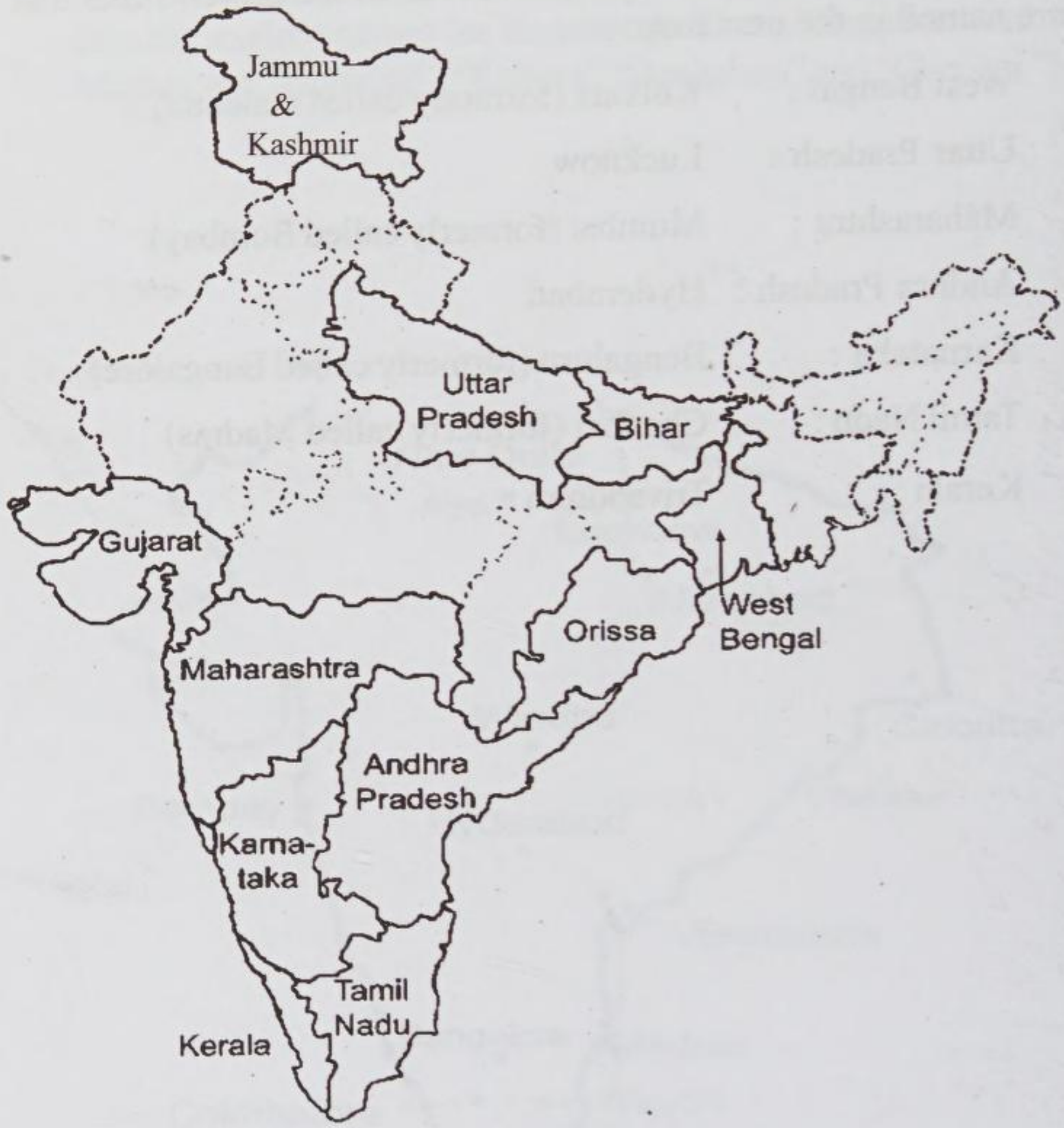
What is now Bangladesh was "East Bengal" from 1906 to 1947, and then was part of Pakistan from 1947 to 1971. The main language there is the same—Bengali—as in the Indian state of West Bengal. More than 85% of the Bangladeshis, and some 20-25% of the West Bengalis, are Muslims.

2. Fifteen Indian cities and towns (with the names used in Gora's day; the modern names for Bombay, Calcutta, Bangalore and Madras are "Mumbai", "Kolkata" "Bengaluru" and "Chennai.")

These cities include the capitals of seven of the eleven states that are named in the next map:

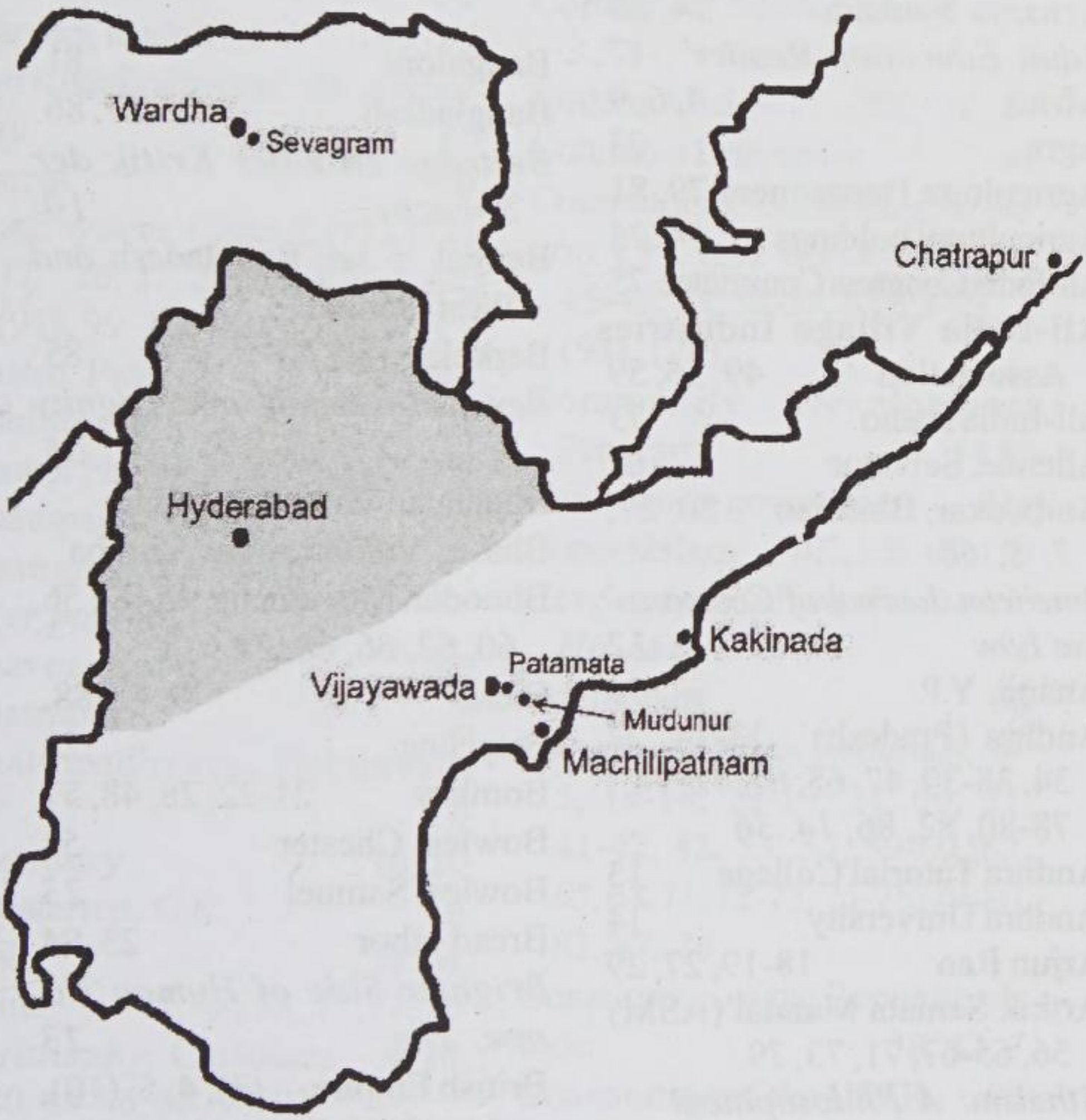
West Bengal :	Kolkata (formerly called Calcutta)
Uttar Pradesh :	Lucknow
Maharashtra :	Mumbai (formerly called Bombay)
Andhra Pradesh :	Hyderabad
Karnataka :	Bengaluru (formerly called Bangalore)
Tamil Nadu :	Chennai (formerly called Madras)
Kerala :	Trivandrum

3. Eleven of India's 28 states (as of 2009)



Every so often, a new state is created by dividing up an old one, in the hope that more public financing will be provided by the national government in New Delhi. (Bihar, for instance, included until 2000 the area that is now a separate state just south of it.) Apart from that, most of the modern borders were drawn in the 1950s. All the states in south India, and some of those in the north, have their own languages. The main "link-language" in south India is English; in north India, Hindi.

4. Some cities, towns and villages in Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra and Orissa:



The shaded area represents Telangana, the northwest part of Andhra Pradesh, including about half of the area between Hyderabad and Vijayawada.

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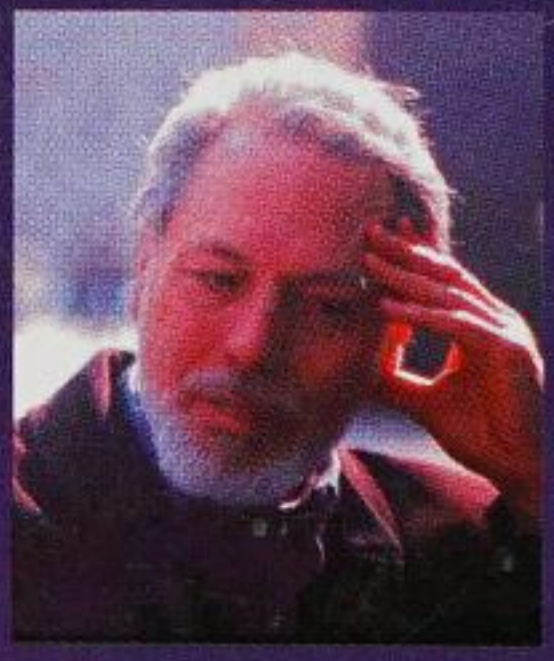

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Mark Lindley was born in Washington DC in 1937 and has taught at universities in Western Europe, Turkey, India and China as well as the USA.

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•Gandhi and Humanism (Humanist Chaplaincy, Harvard University, 1995; 3rd ed., 2005)

•Gandhi and the World Today (1998), A Recent American View (University of Kerala)

• Gandhi as We Have Known Him, with Lavanam Gora (National Gandhi Museum, New Delhi, 2005; 2nd ed., 2009)

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